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65



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contents

36 Civilization III

After tasting our exclusive playable code, we adjourned to the war room to chat with Sid Meier, Jeff Briggs and Jeff Morris from Firaxis



112  CD Powerplay
What's on the discs and how to play it!



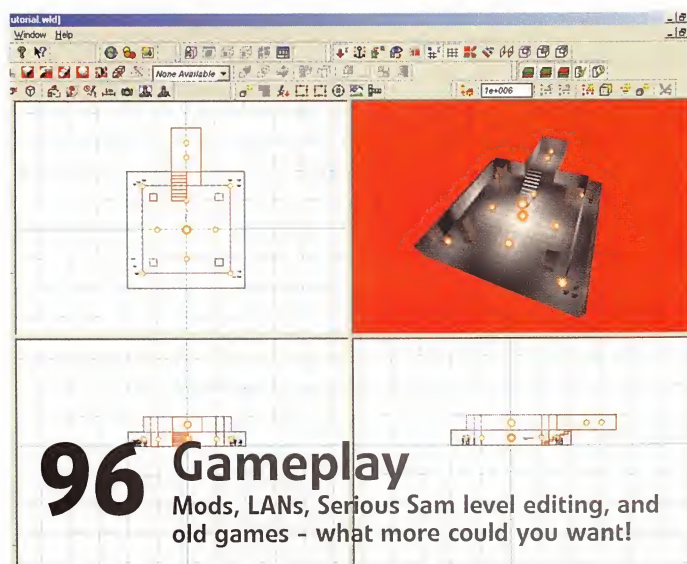
26 State of Play

Are Online Worlds really the future of gaming?



44 Sound Game Design

We investigate the crucial link between sound and gameplay



96 Gameplay

Mods, LANs, Serious Sam level editing, and old games - what more could you want!

SPOTLIGHT

08

Gaming news from all quarters of the globe

08

The Sims: Hot Date revealed, plus updates on Red Faction and more!

24 DVDA

James Cotte's edgy views on film

26 State of Play

Online Worlds



FORUM

28

Eavesdrop on conversations among the PCPP community

28 Roundtable

What's wrong with online worlds?

32 Inbox

Now with excerpts from the forums

GAMES IN REVIEW

52

The most authoritative reviews around

54 Max Payne

The next big thing or an unutterable pile of poo? Our review tells!

58 Eurofighter Typhoon

It's a grey aeroplane with a whole lot of bombs up its date

60 Anachronox

How to do an RPG properly

62 Fly! 2

For those who don't like guns

64 Throne of Bhaal

The expansion for one of the most successful RPGs of all time.

66 Sudden Strike Forever

The definitive WWII RTS gets even more definitive with new missions!

66 Legends of Might & Magic

Counterstrike with orcs. Except crap

68 Original War

An attempt to revolutionise the RTS

TECH IN REVIEW

75

The silicon state of the art

76 Powertest

Michael Wu dusts off the old free trial CDs and Powertest's 23 ISPs

82 Hotware

All the latest hardware, gadgets and peripherals reviewed

90 The Beast

The ultimate PC gamer's rig. Now includes the Beastie!

92 Setup

If your PC is ailing, Nurse Nathanael has the cure

GAMEPLAY

96

Getting the most out of your games

96

Our expanded mod reviews kick off with Neil Manke's They Hunger 3

99 Lan Diary

Spoonman's day at Frag-All Rock

100 Serious Sam Tutorial

Get acquainted with Croatian

104 In Hindsight

Peter Molyneux discusses the success and failure of Black & White

106 Action Replay

Really, just how great was Deus Ex again? Oh, *that* great...

108 Hall of fame

The games you need to own



110 Flashback

We dip into the time capsule and find copulating cats and PCPP#13

112 CD Guide

All Harry's gaming goodness distilled to a mere two pages

SUBSCRIBE

72

72 Subscribe and win!

Save up to 45% off your favourite magazine! And win a Morpheus Geforce 3 and a copy of Max Payne while you're at it!



TIME...TO...DIE...

Of course, I'm not really dying. But this is my final issue as Editor of PC PowerPlay. Before I say anything else, I'd like to thank everyone I've worked with on the magazine, everyone I've met throughout the industry, and every reader I've corresponded with throughout the last two-and-a-half years. Cheers.

Next month will see a new man take the reins to steer PCPP into a new era. It will be a smooth hand over; one month my name will be on this page, the next month it will be Anthony's. I wish him all the best - if only because I'll be calling him every other day for freelance work.

All of which makes this issue's cover feature very appropriate. The first issue of PCPP I contributed to - indeed, it was the first ever issue of the magazine - carried a review of Civilization II. When I joined full-time as Staff Writer, the team was just applying the finishing touches to the Civ: Call to Power cover of PCPP#36. And now I'm leaving just in time for Civilization III. It would probably only add to such serendipity if I mentioned I haven't played any of those three titles.

The other thing I ought to mention is the design changes you'll no doubt notice over the following 100-odd pages. Emma has done a brilliant job (and worked long hours beyond the call of duty) in creating the best-looking issue ever. Check out the streamlined and expanded Spotlight section, now bringing you up-to-the-minute progress reports on the most significant titles in development as well as plenty of new game and hardware announcements. Our features now look stunning too, as evident in our in-depth look at Civ III and an exploration of the importance of sound in game design.

The reviews section has also been given a radical overhaul. With it, we think we're now giving you a far more informative and entertaining read. Turn to p52 for a full explanation of the new review format.

Last but not least, there's the return of the much-missed Gameplay section. Here is where you'll find articles on the games you're playing right now - and ways to get more out of the experience. Each issue, Gameplay will bring you a clutch of mod reviews (all of which will be included on the coverdiscs), reports on LAN events, tutorials on map and level editing, and retrospectives on recent games. Hope you like it.

And that's as good a note as any to finish on...

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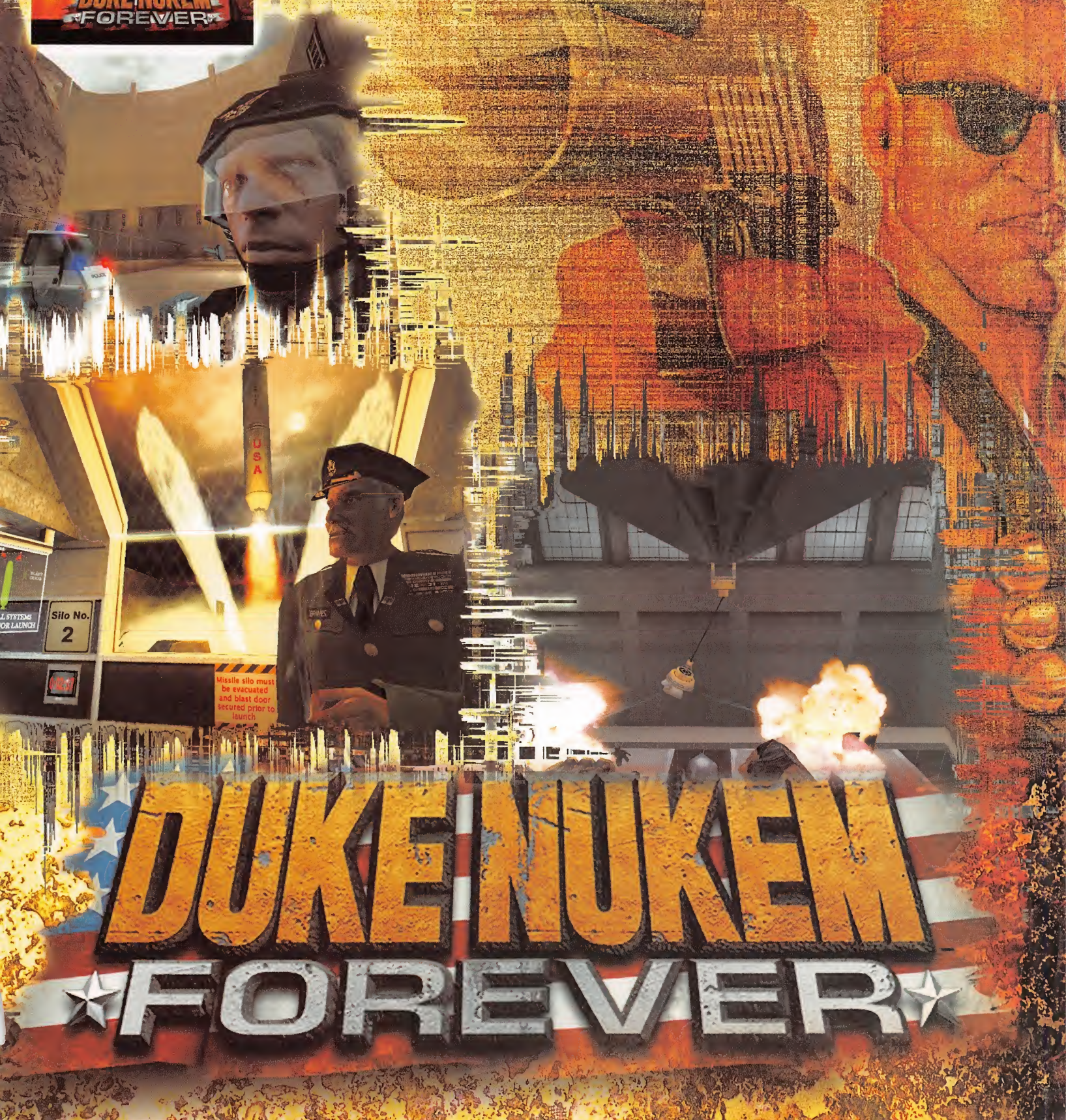
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spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

Let's get together

HOT DATE AND THE SIMFUTURE

The Sims is the game of our time with towering sales in excess of 100,000 in Australia alone (only in recent months falling from the number one sales position) and in excess of four million worldwide. This means that anticipation for the new Sims titles is running at an all time high. Before the high profile Simsville and Sims Online titles are unleashed on the Sims faithful and the world, Maxis and Electronic Arts will deliver a third expansion pack to the original,

extremely intimate personal interaction.

LeTourneau states: "Obviously we want to really play up dating behaviour and romance. Sims can now "Check Out" a potential date from across the room. The question is whether the attention will be well received. There are also variety of new kisses as well. Do you end the date with a "Peck on the Cheek" or "Tonsil Hockey?" And I'm sure people will enjoy spending some time "Playing" in the new Love Tub."

"Just like everyone, the Sims are looking for love, Hot Date allows Sims to experience the hilarious ups and downs of the dating game."

entitled The Sims: Hot Date. The first two expansion packs, Livin' Large and House Party broadened the opportunities for interaction with extra neighbourhoods and items, now the Sims can spread their wings and find a perfect partner. Hot Date introduces a whole new neighbourhood to interact in and a whole new level of intimacy to The Sims.

PC Powerplay spoke exclusively to Tim LeTourneau, Producer at Maxis, who oversees work on the Sims projects. "Just like everyone, the Sims are looking for love, Hot Date allows Sims to experience the hilarious ups and downs of the dating game." The EA press release states: "Players can have their Sims ask each other out on a date or try their luck with an in-game dating service. Arrange to meet another Sim Downtown at exciting and romantic locations that the player can create. Everything from a candle lit dinner, a drink at the bar or a

Dating fits into the larger Sims experience by offering another way to the "whole ball of wax" - social success in The Sims. LeTourneau promises: "Dating is great way to get there quicker, if you're skilful."

LeTourneau explains downtown: "Players will be able to build and equip the Downtown lots to provide the perfect locations for Sim-socialising. When Sims are ready to explore, they call a cab and they are on their way." Sims can build Downtown in addition to their own homes and can use Downtown as a place to be entertained." Downtown isn't just for the singles though. The whole family can enjoy the delights of the hoi polloi. Even married Sims can venture Downtown - to cheat. LeTourneau adds that "everyone in the neighbourhood can go downtown, [so] just don't get caught." The chance to develop another area of town seems to



When she's good, she's very very good. And when she's bad she's one hell of a hot date - here Nic scores bigtime, and right in the spotlight!

rendezvous in the park is possible as your Sim attempts to orchestrate an evening to remember. Sims can now flirt, play footsie, engage in a little tonsil hockey, or converse in Simlish about new and diverse interests. Being a fun and fascinating date gets your Sim one step closer to a goodnight kiss or more!"

Hot Date features exciting new conversation options, new characters (including The Jock, Femme Fatale, Mr Medallion and the Blonde Bombshell!) and 100 new objects (including the Picnic Basket, Cuddle Couch and the Love Tub). Also the new Downtown area filled with cafes, restaurants and other romantic diversions. The new social interactions in Hot Date focus on



No matter how lucky you are in love, disappointment is always just around the corner. One moment they're all over you, the next you've got ice down your sportcoat

stray into Simsville's community atmosphere but players will still need transport to move between neighbourhoods and Downtown. LeTourneau explains: "The Sims, The Sims Online and Simsville are three completely different games. They all share a common world but each has it's own unique take on it. Walking around the neighbourhood is Simsville's territory." News of future Maxis projects has slowed to a trickle following E3 but interest is at an all time high. With the Inform national sales charts still dominated by The Sims, Hot Date will barely plug the tide of anticipation for Sims Online and Simsville. Release date for The Sims: Hot Date is early November 2001. ■

Faster, higher, 13373|2

WORLD'S FIRST CYBER OLYMPIC GAMES IN SEOUL DEC 2001

400 gamers representing 25 countries will compete in the World Cyber Games (WCG), the first "Cyber Olympics" ever, to be held 5 - 9 December this year in Seoul, Korea. The Cyber Cultural Festival (CCF) will take place in conjunction with WCG, giving the international games community another chance to gather for discussion. The CCF Exhibition will feature the latest games technology and CCF Conference will promote information exchange about the games industry. The increasing popularity of multiplayer online games has caused the ranks of professional gamers to swell. Naturally big international events are the next logical step for this burgeoning field. The World Cyber Games Challenge held in Seoul last year was the first step to an international competition, testing the viability of a "Cyber Olympics". This competition featured 182 players from 17 countries, competing in Quake III Arena, Age of Empires II, Starcraft: Brood War and FIFA 2000. The

winners shared in US\$200 000 in prize money. The World Cyber Games will expand on the World Cyber Games Challenge format offering categories for teams and singleplayer entrants. Official competition games at this stage include FIFA 2001, Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament, Age of Empires II: The Conquerors and Quake III Arena. Total prize money at the 1st WCG is three hundred thousand dollars (US\$300,000), which makes it the highest value games competition in the world. According to publicity for the occasion: "The 1st World Cyber Games is a comprehensive Digital Culture Festival, where language and cultural barriers are stripped away and international exchange and harmony are promoted

through extensive conferences and exhibitions." The official slogan is "Beyond the Game" and the Games look to promote "temperance, delight and curiosity", while the mascot represents "Virtuality, Reality, and Community". iStarzone is organising and hosting the Australian and New Zealand qualifying stages for WCG 2001. Contrary to popular belief, this is not a professional event, any Australian citizen is eligible to enter to represent their country. Five state qualifying events will take place in NSW, WA & SA, QLD & NT, Vic & Tas and ACT, with the Grand Final in Sydney on 28th Oct. The Australian national preliminaries will be held at iStarzone in Sydney, the largest Internet café in Australia. ■



Garrett's back

FIRST EYEBALL ON THIEF 3

The first screenshots and concept art for Thief 3 have been released. These stunning images demonstrate the capabilities of the next generation Unreal Engine which replaces the Dark Engine of previous Thief titles. Various screenshots demonstrated a high level of detail (with final polygon counts) as well as lighting and texturing. The comparison to be made between concept art and an actual screenshot bodes well for Thief III. Confirmed by the art is Garrett's role as the hero, as well as the inclusion of both the Tricksterites (or pagans) and the Keepers. In recent development updates, **Randy Smith**, Project Director at ION Storm has highlighted the headway made by the Thief team. Narrative planning is making significant progress with the story final and missions confirmed. Programming is well underway, with three levels



close to completing their first development pass. At present, they feature player movement, interface and enemy AI. Smith mentions that the Unreal engine has been heavily modified to meet the needs of Thief III.



Lighting is just one area that needed attention. When asked about the new Unreal technology, Smith said: "Unreal isn't perfect for us right out of the box, but we're making all the changes it takes to make Thief 3 a great game." ■

A new reality

LEGEND SHOWS OF THE POWER OF UNREAL 2

Since its announcement earlier this year, considerable attention has been afforded the impressive new graphical technology at the heart of Unreal 2. The primary focus has centred on the vast and detailed landscapes the new engine is capable of creating. This has allowed developer Legend to step outside of the usual corridor-based, indoor experience that constitutes most firstperson action games. We were curious as to how this might affect the approach taken to level design.

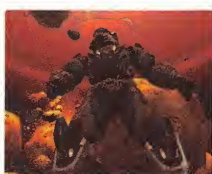
"It's definitely different," explains **Scott Dalton**, Unreal 2's Senior Level Designer. "Often times outdoor environments are really nice for exploration because you've got so much open to you. But we have to use a certain amount of discipline in not giving the player too many options. We need to provide some sort of path otherwise people will get confused about where they're supposed to go and what they're supposed to do."

"It definitely gives us more options. We're not restricted to low poly outdoor areas or indoor corridors; we can mix high poly outdoor and indoor environments and seamlessly move between them." This latter aspect was very much in evidence during the recent demo we witnessed. Dalton showed us a base structure under attack with enemies and defending troops battling outside and inside the building. Such a scene also provided ample opportunity to illustrate the tactical element of the sequel's new squad-based combat.

"What's cool is that you can really decide how you want to control the whole situation," says Dalton. "You can give guys various orders to control what's going to happen, which allows for a lot of replayability. "These scenes always play out differently depending on what you decide to do and how the enemy chooses to react. I can talk to one guy and have him go out and patrol the front of the base, while I accompany the guy with the rocket launcher to stand guard at the back door, and leave someone else to

secure the control room."

The carnage that followed was thrilling; the knowledge that success hinges on tactical alertness as much as your own weapon skills adds an extra layer of tension to each firefight. It also proved that Legend is right on track in creating a game worthy of the Unreal title. ■



australia's most

WANTED

Indicating that everyone just loves shooting Nazis, Return to Castle Wolfenstein clings to a precarious lead in this month's list. In second place, and doing a good job of sneaking its way up the chart, is Bioware's take on computerising pen-and-paper roleplaying. Neverwinter Nights is without doubt the most keenly anticipated RPG since, well, Baldur's Gate. Bioware must be doing something right. A quartet of shooters occupy the lower reaches, while political sim Republic debuts.

- | | |
|----|------------------------------|
| 1 | Return to Castle Wolfenstein |
| 2 | Neverwinter Nights |
| 3 | Star Wars Galaxies |
| 4 | Empire Earth |
| 5 | Red Faction |
| 6 | Medal of Honor |
| 7 | Republic |
| 8 | Duke Nukem Forever |
| 9 | Doom 3 |
| 10 | Age of Mythology |



This month's winner is N. Johns, Broadmeadow VIC. A copy of Planetside will be yours sometime next year. Send your top five most wanted games to: wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au

Creature Isles discovered

BLACK & WHITE'S "MINI-SEQUEL"

The new add-on to Black & White, or "mini-sequel" as Lionheads put it, will feature new creatures, skills, spells and miracles as well as an intriguing creature apprentice feature.

The Creature Isles is a strange new land discovered by the singing missionaries of Black & White. The strange new creatures that inhabit this land live as a Brotherhood. There are no gods on Creature Isles until the player and his creature arrives. All new challenges must be overcome for the creature to be admitted to the Brotherhood.

The mini-sequel will also boast creature apprentices - creatures that learn from your creature, the way he, in turn, learns from you. As the screenshots suggest, some of the new creatures include a chicken and a zebra. This unique study of AI will give an interesting twist to the Black & White experience.

Peter Molyneux, Lionhead's impresario, says:



"Creature Isles has allowed us to evolve the creature AI of Black & White even further. We have been able to include more games, puzzles and new features, miracles and skills as well. We wanted this mini-sequel to bring some genuinely new gameplay



elements to Black & White. Creature Isles does just that." Creature Isles is expected for release in October of this year with a further mystery mini-sequel expected early in the new year. ■

Still Hidden, and even more Dangerous

ILLUSION UNVEILS ITS TACTICAL SHOOTER SEQUEL

Hidden & Dangerous was a tremendous success for Czech developer Illusion Softworks when it was released in 1999. Despite the game's many bugs it has proved to be one of the defining titles of recent years, helping to shape a new genre for the squad-based tactical shooter. Fans of the original game will be eagerly anticipating the release of its sequel, which is due out early next year.

Once again you can be in charge of a team of elite commandos, operating behind-the-lines in various theatres of World War II. **Hidden & Dangerous 2** promises to recapture the atmosphere and tension of the first game, but this time it should arrive in a much more solid and finessed package. The sequel is being developed using Illusion's new LS3D engine, which is also being used for *Mafia*. The new engine allows for some truly incredible visuals with outdoor scenarios featuring prominently.

The new engine also provides for realistically modelled physics for the vehicles, weapon ballistics and environment interaction. Authentic ballistics modelling means that bullets will trace an accurate trajectory, including ricocheting off hard surfaces and penetrating walls. Damage zones similar to those in *Soldier of Fortune* will allow enemies to be wounded in many different ways, and even have the weapon shot out of their hands.

The original game featured different movement styles (including crawling and rolling) which will be expanded to allow for swimming, climbing and lowering your character from heights. Elite commando units should no longer be stopped by knee-high picket fences! Not only will all these new actions help to get you through the missions, but your team will also look fantastic whilst doing them, thanks to the use of motion-captured animation.

None of the characters in **Hidden & Dangerous** were particularly distinctive, and you never really felt too close to any of them. Illusion is hoping to rectify this in the



sequel by featuring one main character, Major Gary Bristol, a member of Britain's Special Operations Executive. You can choose additional men for each mission, but you must now keep Bristol alive for the entire game. Also, men now develop their skills throughout the campaign, so losing any one of them should be a more traumatic experience. From what we've seen so far, this game seems to be improving upon everything that made its predecessor such a cult success. The game is looking great, and with another six months of work to go, Illusion should be able to ensure that this time the game is released bug-free and brilliant. ■



Win!

TRY TO BE CIVILISED, PLEASE

After you've read our cover feature starting p32, *Civilization III* has no doubt shot to the top of most readers' most wanted lists - and with a bullet probably. Sid Meier has forged a career out of crafting deep, complex strategic simulations; from *Railroad Tycoon* and *Pirates* through to the *Civilization* series, he's never failed to disappoint. On the evidence gathered thus far, *Civ III* won't be any different.

Ozisoft has given us six special prize packs to give away this month. Each of the six winners will receive a boxed copy of *Civilization III* once it's released in November this year, plus an Infogrames t-shirt signed by Sid Meier himself. To be in the running, all you have to is answer the following question:

Q: What are the ten most populated countries in the world?




Put your answer on the back of an envelope, alongside your name and address, and send your entry to:

**Try to be civilised, please
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Winners will be announced in PCPP#67.



BATTLE REALMS™



EVERY WARRIOR HAS A NAME...

Secure online currency

TEHCNOCASH TO BOOST ONLINE SHOPPING

While Australians continue to flock to the internet, online shopping remains a largely untapped market. Less than 10% of Australians currently use the Internet for purchases. One Australian company has launched a new e-currency. Technocash is not linked to a person or their banking records and Technocash identifying numbers do not need to be disclosed to merchants to settle transactions. Technocode serial numbers are delivered via email, SMS, fax or post and are protected with a password. Technocash can be obtained online or from Australia Post offices.

"Australians have been slow to take up internet shopping because of concerns about the security of the transactions," said Technocash joint managing director, Mr Raymond Pakalns.

"Technocash provides the same benefits of cash: control, safety and transferability. It is an alternative payment



system that doesn't require credit card number or personal details to be given." Since access to Technocash is not limited to credit card holders, a whole new market will be able to purchase online. Online retailers that have accepted Technocash include

TECHNOCASH can be bought at:

- giroPost Australia Post outlets
- Directly from us using Internet Banking

Buying TECHNOCASH from Australia Post

- **PRINT** off a barcoded application form
- **TAKE** your application form to your nearest giroPost Australia Post outlet
- **ASK** the operator to scan the barcode and tell them how much TECHNOCASH you would like to buy. You can buy between

Jaycar, Metalshop and Sydney-based PC games retailer Gamesmarket. Only on Australian websites at present, interest from New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, Italy and India could see Technocash spread worldwide. ■

work in question involves the opportunity to reinvent the online shooter. At E3, Gore was licensed by other game developers," says Grigg. "I think what stands out the most about the engine is its networking centred architecture, giving it that great online gameplay no matter what kind of connection you have."

New screens and more details have been released for Black Thorn, the Rogue Spear stand-alone mission pack that was unveiled earlier this year. This pack will feature ten new story-based missions with the frantic stealth and gung-ho bravado that characterised the original. The pack features new weapons including the highly requested FAMAS assault rifle. These new missions are accurate recreations of copycat terrorist attacks from recent history. Black Thorn will introduce six new multiplayer maps for the on-line players, locations including an Alaskan oil depot, a pagoda and a hidden terrorist encampment. There is also a new multiplayer mode, Lone Wolf, a piggy-in-the-middle, one against the rest style game. The lone wolf has access to an entire arsenal while the other players are equipped only with pistols. The pistol pack must hunt down the heavily armed individual, and when the lone wolf is killed, another player takes the role. In other first person related news, Raven Software has compiled the Soldier of Fortune: Platinum Edition to be released later this year. It will feature Soldier of Fortune Gold Edition, the latest Patch 1.07f (which apart from resolving various bug fixes, removes WON and adds GameSpy), 5 new specially design multiplayer maps, a complete strategy guide for the game (in .pdf format) as well as a Trailer and Video footage of the upcoming Soldier of Fortune 2: Double Helix. A perfect opportunity for the uninitiated to step into the Soldier of Fortune fold just as Double Helix nears release.



Gory Details

ONLINE SHOOTER BRIDGES THE PACIFIC OCEAN

Judging from the response we received, plenty of readers enjoyed the Gore test demo included on the coverdisc of PCPP#61. Those who checked it out would know Gore is a highly promising multiplayer-based firstperson shooter that certainly lives up to its name. What you probably didn't know is that much of its development has occurred in Australia. **Robert Grigg** is the Lead Programmer on Gore. In 1997 he co-founded multimedia company Eyecon, based in Queensland, to work on a diverse range of projects, from Channel Nine's Wimbledon coverage to TV shows such as Now You See It. However, through this period the team's major passion remained computer games.



"The gamer in us all drove towards creating an ever more game development focused company," says Grigg. "Like a cancer it inevitably took over Eyecon. Now nearly all our work is somewhat games related. We found games developing the most challenging and the most enjoyable of all the work."

It's hardly a surprising conclusion given the work in question involves the opportunity to reinvent the online shooter. At E3 in 1998 Eyecon - via mutual acquaintance Slam Software - met with 4D Rulers, an independent developer, and discussed the benefits of forming a partnership. 4D Rulers would gain from Eyecon's programming nous, while the latter could mine the former's creative resources. The end result was Gore, designed by 4D Rulers and powered by Eyecon's revision of Slam's AMP engine.

"The technology behind Gore has been built to be licensed by other game developers," says Grigg. "I think what stands out the most about the engine is its networking centred architecture, giving it that great online gameplay no matter what kind of connection you have. "We feel that all our backgrounds of extreme hours of FPS playing have combined into Gore in a way that is very additive and has more aspects to it than with our main competitors."

Gore's focus is online play, whether it's traditional deathmatch or team-based variants. In addition to the usual character classes, Gore features a number of novel takes on the formula. Player stamina depletes when running and jumping, but can be replenished by resting or powerups. Armour is mapped onto character models so unprotected limbs can be hit for greater damage. Also power-ups can be shot at and destroyed. Such features should reveal a layer of strategy untouched by similar titles. Eyecon and 4D Rulers are gearing up for another test version of Gore in the near future. You'll find it on our coverdisc when it's finished. ■

A REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME FEATURING THE WEAPONS OF TODAY'S MILITARY

REAL WAR

AIR LAND SEA



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from the people
who make real
wars." - IGN**

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JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
TRAINING GAME DEVELOPED
FOR THE U.S. MILITARY**



**IN STORES
SEPTEMBER 2001!**

QVS
QUANTUM SOFTWARE

Explore the Final Frontier

CAPTAIN'S LOG UPDATE ON BRIDGE COMMANDER

We recently spoke to Larry Holland about Star Trek: Bridge Commander, the forthcoming Star Trek 3D space simulation. Holland is the Creative Director on Bridge Commander and president of Totally Games (famous for their work on the LucasArts X-Wing and TIE Fighter series).

"The focus of Bridge Commander is exploration and discovery taking place on a large capital ship with a diverse crew and all the tension and excitement that this entails," Holland says. "It will definitely appeal to gamers. As in the opening - 'To go where no one has gone before' - we located the bulk of the story in an area of the Alpha quadrant that was still relatively unexplored."

The game will be firmly based in the familiar Star Trek: Next Generation universe, with a fresh perspective. Holland explained: "We wanted to include memorable characters like Picard and Data in the plot, without making the story entirely about them. This is being done through cameos, which works really well in the storyline. It was definitely the right way to create a new experience."

Players will take centre stage, as the Commander of a starship, in delivering orders to crew members, conducting negotiations and directing the starship in battle. Holland discusses the player's role: "The majority of ship functions are done automatically. You can quickly see if one of the bridge crew has a standing order or is waiting for new orders and all the commands are ones you would have regularly heard in a Star Trek episode." The 3D tactical mode features complete access to all the controls available when on the bridge.

"There is considerable dramatic tension in the story as it is a race to discover the cause of an interstellar catastrophe that has killed your Captain and hundreds of colonists while trying to grow into your new role," Holland reveals.

"We created a story where the player is a first time captain with a bridge crew full of unique characters."



Bridge Commander consists of some 30 missions, over eight unique episodes. Capital ships that will be available to command include the Federation, Galaxy and Sovereign classes. Four player multiplayer via Internet and eight player via LAN will feature five modes: Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Federation vs. non-Federation, Starbase Attack/Defend Mode and Turkey Shoot. Expect Star Trek: Bridge Commander early 2002. ■



Faction wars

RED FACTION MULTIPLAYER DETAILS REVEALED

Volition's upcoming firstperson shooter has certainly captured the attention of many readers judging by its consistently high position in the Australia's Most Wanted poll. Up until now the singleplayer game has been the focal point with multiplayer specifics studiously avoided. So we contacted **Mark Lewis**, Red Faction's Level Designer, to find out more. The multiplayer modes will support up to 32 players battling across a selection of 24 maps. In addition to common or garden deathmatch, team-based variations including Capture the Flag will feature. And for the mod community, the full release will ship with the game's level editor. But the most interesting aspect is how the Geo-Mod technology will impact deathmatch play. "We've taken a couple of approaches here to keep the levels from becoming just a charred pit," says Lewis. "For example, you might blow up a floor, but there

would be a metal support underneath that cannot be destroyed. That will change gameplay a bit in that area, but still keeps the level structure intact.

"The other factor here is whether or not players will have the time to spend on just trying to destroy things in

the middle of a heated fight. It's tough to concentrate on blowing up the whole level when you have other people looking to kill you."

Red Faction is still on track for release in September. ■





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COMING SOON

SEPTEMBER

Alex Ferguson's Player Manager (Take 2 Interactive)
 Codename: Outbreak (Ozisoft)
 Conquest: Frontier Wars (Ubisoft)
 Destroyer Command (Ubisoft)
 F1 2001 (Electronic Arts)
 FlightSim 2002 (Microsoft)
 Industry Giant 2 (Red Ant)
 Le Femme Nikita (Ozisoft)
 NHL 2002 (Electronic Arts)
 Natural Resistance (Red Ant)
 Red Alert 2: Yuri's Revenge (Electronic Arts)
 Red Faction (THQ)
 Spiderman (Activision)
 Supercar Street Challenge (Activision)
 The Art of Magic (Ozisoft)
 Throne of Darkness (Vivendi)
 World War III (Red Ant)
 Zax (Red Ant)
 Zoo Tycoon (Microsoft)

OCTOBER

Aliens vs Predator 2 (Vivendi)
 CRC Renegade (Electronic Arts)
 Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
 Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)
 Evil Twin (Ubisoft)
 FIFA 2002 (Electronic Arts)
 Mafia (Take 2 Interactive)
 Monopoly Tycoon (Ozisoft)
 Motor City Online (Electronic Arts)
 Sid Meier's Sim Golf (Electronic Arts)
 Star Wars: Starfighter (Electronic Arts)
 Stronghold (Take 2 Interactive)

Anno 1503 (Electronic Arts)
 Battle Realms (Ubisoft)
 Civilization 3 (Ozisoft)
 Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza (Vivendi)
 Duke Nukem Forever (Take 2 Interactive)
 Empire Earth (Vivendi)
 Gorasul (Red Ant)
 Harry Potter (Electronic Arts)
 IL-2 Sturmovik (Ubisoft)
 Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (Electronic Arts)
 Project Eden (Ozisoft)
 Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds (Electronic Arts)
 The Sims: Hot Date (Electronic Arts)

Robot Dogs Down Under

SONY CONVINCED AIBO2 HAS MARKET IN AUSTRALIA

The second generation of the Sony
 Entertainment Robotics AIBO Virtual Pet has been launched in Australia, with the first units shipping mid-August. While the first version of the robotic dog was not distributed in this country, Sony believes improvements in AIBO technology and a lower price could see up to 1000 units sold by March 2002. The AIBO2 is an artificially intelligent robot pet which is able to understand more than 50 commands, can recognise a pink rubber ball, and will respond to a name given to it by its owner. Using neural net technology pioneered by Sony, the



device learns as it grows and will develop a personality based on the way it is treated by its owner.

The previous version of AIBO had several shortcomings, notably an inability to distinguish between its pink ball and other pink objects, with the robot having particular difficulty in rooms with pink carpet or bright coloured walls. The old AIBO also had several failure detection problems, where the robot was unable to determine whether or not it had successfully kicked its ball.

The new AIBO combines better AI software with engineering refinements to create a more robust and adaptable robot. Advances in the sensors on the robot's feet mean it is better able to play with its ball. The robot also contains sensors on the forehead and chin, and an acceleration sensor is built into the torso. The head contains a digital camera, and the robot is able to photograph its surroundings and upload the photos to a PC. AIBO2 is able to express six separate artificial emotions corresponding to anger, love, happiness, fear, sadness and frustration. Interestingly, no hate emotion is included.

Robot enthusiasts will find AIBO a useful tool for experimentation with the inclusion of the AIBO MasterStudio software package which allows the robot to be further programmed. New behaviours and actions can be assembled, thanks to Sony's OPEN-R adaptive robotic technology. AIBO2 suitability as a replacement pet is doubtful, since the robot is still very limited in its range of movements and behaviours. Lacking the boisterous nature of even the most mournful of puppies, the device is perhaps better suited to 'look at me' executives and people with a tendency to forget to feed real animals.

AIBO2 retails at \$3000. Accessories such as carry bags and recharge stations, as well as software, cost extra. ■

Separated at birth

ANIMAL SIMS BREED LIKE RABBITS

Have a look at these two screenshots.
 Have a close look. Are they from the same game or two entirely different games? The answer is - surprisingly - the latter.

In what is fast shaping up to be the hottest rivalry in the games industry, Microsoft's Zoo Tycoon will now be going head-to-head with Fishtank Interactive's newly announced Wildlife Park. Both games promise a host of hairy situations guaranteed to bring out the animal within.

In Zoo Tycoon, the player steps into the role of a zookeeper charged with caring for over fifty species of animal, the maintenance of the facilities and the wellbeing of guests.

In Wildlife Park, the player steps into the role of a park manager charged with caring for over fifty species of animal, the maintenance of the facilities and the wellbeing of visitors.



Note the subtle difference. Needless to say, we're incredibly keen to muck out the cages of both titles. It will be fascinating to see which of the two allows for the greater number of ways to torture park attendees. This could well be



the telling factor for success. Zoo Tycoon will be open for visitors in September, while Wildlife Park should be up and running early next year. ■

Epic new chip

64-BIT ITANIUM CPU MAY BE WITH US SOONER THAN YOU THINK

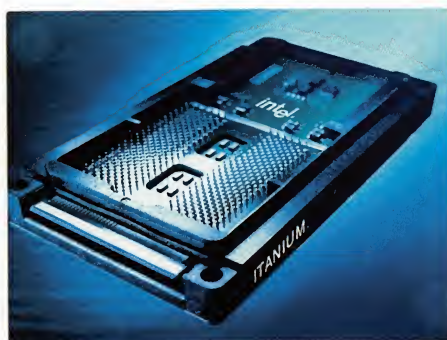
With the aid of Hewlett Packard and after 7 long years in development, Intel has finally brought out its first 64-bit processor. Formerly codenamed 'Merced', the new Itanium processor is the biggest thing since Intel's first x86 32-bit processor - the humble 386. The new 64-bit IA-64 architecture will be the cornerstone of Intel's future assaults on the processor market.

The Itanium abandons the conventional RISC (Reduced Instructions Set Computing) and CISC (Complex Instructions Set Computing) instruction sets in favour of something called EPIC. EPIC, or Explicitly Parallel Instruction Computing if you will, takes advantage of speculation and prediction combined with instruction-level parallelism to allow the Itanium to execute many operations simultaneously on a sustained basis. So what does this all mean? By parallelism, we're talking about multiple instructions that can be executed at the same time. For this to happen, the Itanium needs specially compiled software that 'bundles' instructions together so they can be executed simultaneously. The 'bundled' instructions are run together and do not affect or interfere with the outcomes of each other. The first generation Itanium processor can execute six EPIC instructions in every clock cycle while the Pentium III and the Athlon can only complete three x86 instructions per cycle. And because some instructions require multiple operations that can be done simultaneously by Itanium, up to 20 operations can be completed per clock. Very impressive. Prediction and speculation are two other techniques the EPIC architecture utilises to enhance performance. Those of you that have done programming will be familiar with 'if-then-else' statements, or 'branches' as they are also known. What prediction does is takes advantage of the processor's parallelism by processing all the possibilities before the correct branching path is determined. As soon as this happens, irrelevant branches are immediately discarded. This allows the Itanium to romp through branches quicker than it normally would.

Speculation is a technique that tells the CPU to load data before it is actually needed. This technique is similar to what we know as 'pre-caching' and again takes advantage of the processor's parallelism to get the job done quicker.

Although the Itanium is very impressive and the great potential is undeniable, its performance is enormously dependent on software optimisation. There are 64-bit versions of operating systems such as Windows XP, Linux, Hewlett Packard's HP-UX 11i v1.5 and IBM's AIX-5L directly compatible with the Itanium. But apart from those there are not many other offerings. Without software optimisation, the processor's parallelism will be under-utilised and it'll be no faster than a similarly clocked Pentium III or Athlon. Specially compiled software with intelligent bundling of instructions is essential to the Itanium's success.

Currently there are two speeds available at 733MHz and 800MHz. With a 266MHz system bus (133MHz double-pumped), 32K of L1 cache, 64K of L2 cache, and either 2MB or 4MB of L3 cache, the current Itanium is massively expensive and not suited to desktop applications but rather for high-end servers and workstations. However with AMD's own 64-bit processor nearing completion and speculated to make an early desktop appearance, we are likely to see the Itanium in our boxes sooner rather than later. ■



CONFIDENTIAL

In possibly not the most shocking news of the year, Blizzard has let slip that Warcraft 3 won't be ready to ship this year. Citing perfectionism beyond the call of duty, the RTS specialists have requested yet more time to apply sufficient spit and polish to what was once meant to be a revolutionary roleplaying strategy title. The middle of next year is the current guess for the eventual release. One is tempted to suggest they've been playing just a tad too much Counter-Strike at the office.



More bad news for fans of things fantasy-flavoured. Development on Black Isle's recently announced RPG Torn has been placed on hold indefinitely. Rumour has it the Littech engine licensed for the title just hasn't pulled its weight, thus preventing the RPG specialists from inserting the requisite measure of depth and complexity they are renowned for. Most of the Torn team has been shifted onto a "top secret project" that may well be a sequel to one of their existing titles... But we'd have to kill you if we mentioned which one.

Another game to bite the dust in the past month is Shadows of Reality. Chances are you haven't even heard of it, which should give some clue as to why it's been canned. Touted as a Deus Ex killer, Shadows of Reality was aiming high with ambitions to be the ultimate firstperson roleplaying cyberpunk adventure game. But developer Nevolution ran out of money and that was the end of it.

Wake up call

NEW DEVELOPER ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF REALTIME STRATEGY

Ubisoft has announced a new realtime strategy game entitled The Awakened.

Amusingly named developer Edgies (*Wahey! - James*) is clearly inspired by the Blizzard school of strategic design. With its paper-scissors-rock trio of races and cutesy depiction, The Awakened is almost a surgical fusion of Starcraft and Warcraft.

The three playable races are suitably diverse, if utterly stereotypical in their heritage. The chosen racial themes span medieval times, future technology, and of course an alien race.

"There's an interesting mix of a primitive magic race trying to fight a high-tech sci-fi race," says Producer **Charles Harribey**. "There's also a third race called the Grays. They're just monsters that come in and devour the other races."

Intriguingly, one of the sides collects a resource that

actually encourages the reviled RTS tactic of tank rushing. The resource is the souls of dead comrades; the more friendly units killed in battle, the more resource collected. How to utilise this race effectively, not to mention how to combat it, will surely prove decisive. Edgies is also working on a unique multiplayer mode, where players can team up throughout the whole story arc of a campaign. If someone drops out then the scale of the conflict will automatically adjust to restore play balance.

An early 2002 release is anticipated. ■



Independence day

GARAGE GAMES RETURNS TO THE DAYS OF THE BEDROOM CODER

With the success of *Counter-Strike* and the constant growth of the mod scene, it's hardly surprising that more and more game development houses are looking to the indie game development scene for their next lot of fresh talent. Enter Garage Games.

The brainchild of several ex-Dynamix employees including former frontman and "that guy on the box with the spiffy hair part", **Jeff Tunnel** (Willy Beamish or *Rise of the Dragon*, anyone?), Garage Games is looking to help support indie game development on a broader scale than has really been attempted in such a mainstream way before. "We want to give any and all game makers the opportunity to publish their games, find their audiences - and perhaps make their fortunes," says Tunnel.

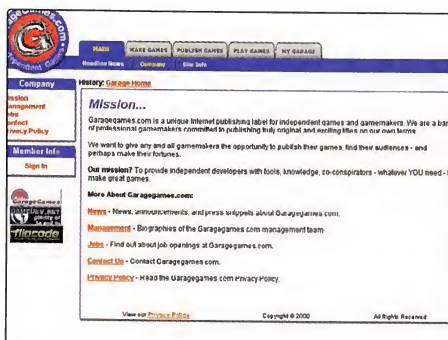
But what exactly do they have on offer? Well, for starters, how about the 3D engine used to power *Tribes 2*? Known as the v12 engine, Garage Games is licensing the engine out to indie development groups for a measly US\$100. Given that other 3D engines, such as Quake 3, LithTech or NetImmerse, can cost into the hundreds of thousands to license, that makes for some pretty fantastic incentive. Even better, amongst fellow licensees the v12 engine is officially open-source. What this means is that any

fixes or updates to the engine will tend to come in a lot more quickly, with the entire community constantly adjusting, tweaking, and updating the engine as technology changes. There's a catch, of course, if you can call it that. Garage Games will let you have the source code for the v12 engine for \$100, but if your game gets to a point where it's ready to go commercial then they retain full rights to publish and sell it, with their cut being based on the game's quality.

If you take the v12 engine and turn it into *Doom 3*, for instance, then you can expect an 80% cut of the royalties, but if it's something that won't sell

as well as that then it gets brought down to as low as 40-50%. Still, having a publisher who gives you a smaller-than-average cut is better than having no publisher at all.

"There is a huge need for a new model," says Tunnel, "and we want to be the ones to help make it happen." Here's hoping they'll do just that. ■



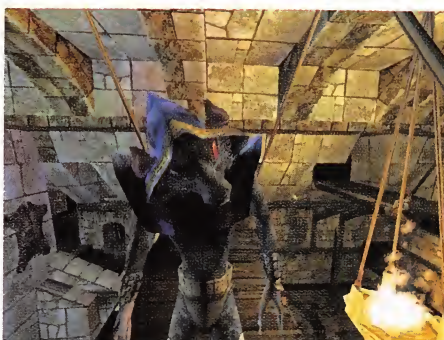
Arx Fatalis

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD REVISITED

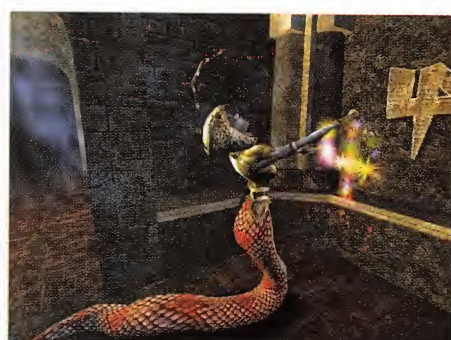
Arx Fatalis is the firstperson RPG in production at Arkane Studios based in France. Stopping short of saying that this will be the new *Ultima Underworld*, **Raphael Colantonio**, Lead Designer of *Arx Fatalis* stated: "we're trying to recreate the same 'feelings' we liked in *Underworld*... [such as] an involving multithread story, an oppressive hostile but mysterious environment, with 'believable' characters, a high level of interactivity between objects, deep audio atmosphere".

To help in this, Paul Neurath (one of the creators of the original *Underworld* and former CEO of Looking Glass) is working on voice production, audio and some English scripting.

Arkane wants to reintroduce the RPG world to the immersive nature of firstperson games, which create emotions like fear far better than thirdperson games. Colantonio said: "We try to do something more



zoomed in, more 'into' the hero, working on the immersive side." Freedom offered to the player is focussed on NPC interaction and multiple paths of progressing. Colantonio said, "The nature of the game, and the object orientated game design makes

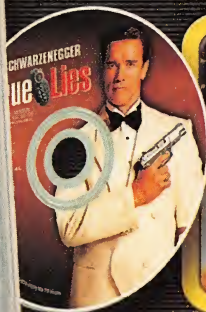
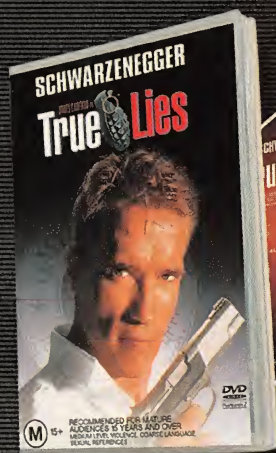


the game multisolution by itself, up to a point that players might find solutions that we haven't even thought about."

Arx Fatalis is being published by FishTank and will be released 2nd Qtr 2002. ■

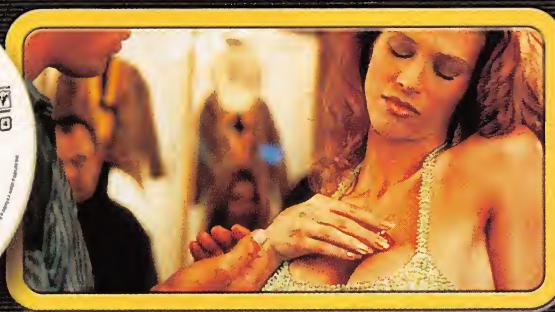
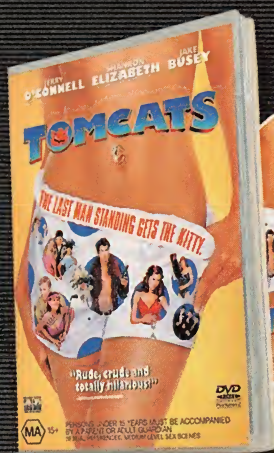
3 REASONS WHY MEN ARE COUCH POTATOES

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2. SEXY COMEDY



OWN IT FROM SEPTEMBER 19

3. ROCK 'N' ROLL



OWN IT FROM SEPTEMBER 12

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greetings champions of the 133+ and welcome to my amazing new look column with the logo that i designed and everything. actually this is the second logo i designed because the first logo was supposedly inappropriate because you could see my cat's bits but i don't think this is a problem because he is only a cat and his bits don't look the same as other bits i have seen on the web when i try to find game cheats. the top news story about the pcpp website is all about how the news is always getting updated now because ROM is updating it because is the main updater and his stories are really great he is mr opinion and now you can read all about his recommended quake3 maps and other maps at our website which is www.pcpowerplay.com.au anyway i am sure you are all dying to know what is

happening with me and crazyminx well not much is happening because my father found the photograph of crazyminx at her school swimming carnival. well at least she says it was at her school swimming carnival but there weren't many other kids around plus her swimsuit wasn't very practical for racing but maybe she was in the water polo or something i don't know but anyway my dad says i can't talk to crazyminx any more and its 100% not fair and totally lame. also he had to cancel his credit card because these russian men were taking money from it and also some men in california and also some men in a place with a rude name called bangkok which is a funny name. but he was angry anyway and i am grounded and he says i won't be allowed to have a credit card until i am 37 which is quite a long way away.



i offered to pay my dad back all the money the men took from his credit card but dad sort of started crying and said i would never be able to pay back the money in twenty years of hard labour and that he was ruined or something although he looked okay to me except for the crying. anyway i have to go and sell matches in the street now so until next time l8er j00|z!■

Worms in 3D

CLASSIC STRATEGY REBORN

Worms Blast, the latest in the long-running

Worms series, will be developed by Team 17 and published by Ubi Soft. This incarnation of Worms will be in real-time and fully 3D, a significant departure from the established 2D, turn-based format. Ubi Soft Press release states "the series moves into new territory whilst retaining the familiar, addictive game play that is Worms." Players can choose one of eight characters from the Worms universe and battle in single and multiplayer modes. The holy hand grenade, rocket launchers, shotguns and exploding sheep are just some of the quirky, weapons of mass destruction that return from past titles. New additions to the Worms arsenal include sea monster attacks, meteor storms and torpedoes. The new 3D view should create even more tension that seen in past titles.



Ubi Soft press promises "The series' famed intuitive game play and cartoon-like sense of humour will ensure the game will appeal to hardened Worms veterans and newcomers alike... The unpredictable



nature of your opponents means that death can come from any direction, while the themed levels and their varying climates throw up a wealth of unwelcome surprises." Worms Blast is expected for release 3rd Qtr 2001.■



Win!

THE ART OF SUMMONER

Are your walls bare since you tore down those Britney Spears posters? Surrounded by beige since you tore Kurt Cobain's ugly mug down? It's time for your walls to step into the new millennium!

Thanks to the lovely individuals at THQ we have five giant, exclusive autographed Summoner prints, featuring the glorious cover art from the RPG classic. For your chance to win home this piece of PC gaming history, summon us this:

"What is the first prime number between 30,000 and 40,000?" or "Why am I unqualified to answer this question (in ten words or less)?"

Put your answer on the back of an envelope, alongside your name and address, and send your entry to:

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Winners will be announced in PCPP#67.

inform**The Official Australian Games Chart**

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSOM

W/E 15 JULY 2001

TOP 20**Best Selling Full Price PC Games** (over \$30)

- | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction | RPG |
| 2 | ◆ | Half Life Blue Shift | Action |
| 3 | ▲ | The Sims | Strategy |
| 4 | ▼ | Baldurs Gate 2:Bhaal | RPG |
| 5 | ◆ | The Sims Collectors Ed | Strategy |
| 6 | ▼ | Operation Flashpoint | Strategy |
| 7 | ▲ | Diablo 2 | RPG |
| 8 | ▼ | The Sims House Party | Strategy |
| 9 | ▼ | Myst III: Exile | Adventure |
| 10 | ◆ | The Sims Livin' Large | Strategy |
| 11 | ▼ | Emperor Battle For Dune | Strategy |
| 12 | ▲ | Sim City 3000 Unlimited | Strategy |
| 13 | ▼ | Train Simulator | Simulator |
| 14 | ◆ | Sim Mania Pack | Strategy |
| 15 | ▲ | Half Life Ptm Edition | Action |
| 16 | ◆ | Rugby 2001 | Sports |
| 17 | ▼ | Rollercoaster Tycoon Ctn | Strategy |
| 18 | ▲ | Sim Mania For Kids | Strategy |
| 19 | ◆ | Half Life Counter Strike | Action |
| 20 | ◆ | Age Of Empires 2 | Strategy |

◆ New Entry ◆ Non Mover ▲ Up from last week ▼ Down from last week

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DVDA

WITH JAMES COTTEE

BLACKADDER 2

Roadshow, M

Perhaps the finest hour of British comedy, certainly the best of the four Black Adder TV series. Join Lord Blackadder on an excursion into the seedy underbelly of Elizabethan England, where potatoes are as precious as gold, the heads in Traitor's Cloister are green, and udder-fixations know no bounds. Cameos include Rik Mayall, Tom Baker and Hugh Laurie, supporting the irrepressible Rowan Atkinson and Stephen Fry. Zero extras on the disc, but that's not going to stop you. Three hours of superlative



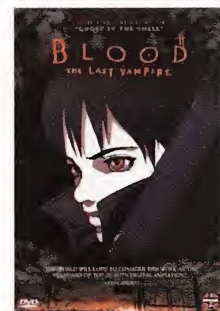
entertainment. The first series has also been re-released, in case you missed the first pressing.

SCORE 5/5

BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE

Madman, M

Remember Ghost in the Shell? Its director, Mamoru Oshii, had his hand in this, and he's got the Midas touch. Okinawa 1966: creepy vampire creatures are raiding the US bases for fresh human blood, and only one elite agent can stop them. Imagine the best bits of Buffy and The X-Files, only with more blood. This is the first anime feature film to be produced entirely on computer, and the slick production values, freaky direction, and pumping sound make this the best schoolgirl-with-a-sword film yet. Interviews and storyboards are included, and the mastering is first-rate. It's not Shakespeare, but it's awesome fun.



SCORE 4/5

BUBBLEGUM CRISIS VOL 4

Madman, M

The plot thickens. What started as a simple good-versus-evil scenario has panned out into a battle for the future of humanity. Japanese paranoia regarding genetic impurity and microscopic germs means that anime usually interprets this kind of threat as a hideous bio-mechanical blob, or an iridescent ten year old girl, or both. Bubblegum Crisis is no exception. There's plenty of battle-suit combat action to move things along, and these discs keep you weeks ahead of the SBS telecasts, so watch ahead and spoil



everything for your friends. Four episodes on the disc, and lots of scenes inside womens' changing rooms. Hurrah!

SCORE 3/5

THE CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO

Madman, PG

There's nothing like a good caper film, and this is one of the best. Directed by Miyazaki, more famous for the outstanding Princess Mononoke, this film from 1980 hasn't aged a day. The plot revolves around the micro-nation of Cagliostro, where liberal financial controls have made it a nexus of economic ne'er-do-wells. None more so than the corrupt ruling Count, who as the film begins is trying unsuccessfully to convince a young princess to tie the knot. Enter master cat-burglar and serial womaniser Wolf, to sweep her off



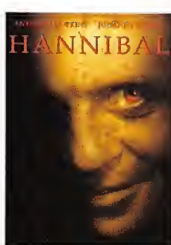
her feet and right every wrong in sight. Unrelenting action, now with Japanese language options.

SCORE 4/5

HANNIBAL

Columbia Tristar, R

As seen on A Current Affair. We all know that in the movie world, if you're evil enough you gain supernatural powers over the law of the land, the laws of physics, thermodynamics, etc. Hannibal, everybody's favourite face-eating fruit, reprises his untouchable bogey man status. Ridley Scott trades off intelligence for classical music and extreme gross-outs, but the value here is in the bonus packed second disc: deleted scenes, making-of, the whole nine yards. If you've ever wanted to see



someone's brains scooped out and eaten while they're still alive, and I know I have, then look no further.

SCORE 3/5

MISS CONGENIALITY

Roadshow, M

Wow, mutton dressed as lamb! Or is that ham? Sandra Bullock, world's most talented actress, does the whole Cinderella thang, except instead of a sooty peasant she's an FBI agent who cares too much. Yes, well, you saw the trailer. That's all there is to it. If you're looking for a joke present for any occasion, and want something more offensive than an inflatable woman, then perhaps a DVD of the most charmless film of the decade will suffice. Co-starring Michael Caine. Surprisingly well-featured disc, with a



whole two commentary tracks. What next, Blame It On Rio? The Bikini Shop? Porky's?!

SCORE 2/5

DR WHO: THE ROBOTS OF DEATH



Roadshow, PG

Finally, the DVD format is being used to re-package humanity's finest artistic achievement: Tom Baker's run on Doctor Who. In this Asimov-inspired tale of technology gone mad, the crew of an automated mining crawler are being murdered one by one. The Doctor and the spunky Leela (arguably the third most rootable of his assistants) are instantly accused, but they're not the ones with glowing red eyes... Bonus materials include a full-length commentary and exclusive behind-the-scenes footage. This one's a must-have. Coming soon: Spearhead From Space! Fingers crossed for the Key To Time saga. Damn, life is good.



SCORE ★★★★★

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION VOL 5

Madman, PG

In the year 2015, a surreal alien invasion is being successfully repelled with giant humanoid robots. After brute force fails, the "Angels" try psychological warfare instead. They've got a lot to work with: every character in this series has serious issues, and they all bubble to the surface as the death toll rises (3 billion and counting). The political intrigue steps up a notch, with a trusted aide revealed as a double agent, and the board that selects the 14 year old robot pilots revealed as a puppet of Ikari Gendo's



raw ambition. Perhaps the most compelling TV show ever. Also, the Eva movie is coming to DVD real soon now.

SCORE ★★★★★

SE7EN

Roadshow, R

The edgy precursor to Fight Club, Se7en drags the viewer into a decrepit realm where God's laws are habitually ignored: the United States! Believe it or not, but they had to scout locations all over the US to get buildings with just the right level of dank. This is a massive two disc set, with four commentary tracks, all the trailers and alternate endings, docs on how they digitally remastered the whole film to make it even darker and colourless than the original print. Plus DTS 6.1 is supported, if you're one of those home cinema



fruits. One of the best value DVD packages to date. All together now: "What's in the box?!"

SCORE ★★★★★

SHAFT

Warner Bros, MA

Who's the black private dick who's a sex machine with all the chicks? Why, John Shaft, of course. Try not to think about that recent abomination, and indulge in the finest blaxploitation ever produced. Also available are the two Shaft sequels: Shaft's Big Score and Shaft in Africa. As part of Warner Bros' policy on cinematic authenticity, only the original mono track is supplied, none of that fancy-pants 5.1 remixing that gets bandied about these days. A bare minimum of extras to distract you, but these dual sided discs support both



widescreen and pan & scan versions, catering to the techno-throwbacks amongst us.

SCORE ★★★★★

TITAN AE

20th Century Fox, PG

Every 20 years the West manages to make a good animated sci-fi film. This is it. Cutting-edge computer graphics mixed with very slick cel work, this is the best space adventure film since The Empire Strikes Back. A sinister race of energy beings called the Drej are obsessed with exterminating humanity, but there's no problem a couple of spunky space teenagers can't solve. In particular, Drew Barrymore's voicing of the sexy Asian chick is divine. The disc has every extra you could imagine, and the sound mix will shake



your house down if you let it. It's difficult to fault this disc, so I won't.

SCORE ★★★★★

X-MEN

20th Century Fox, M

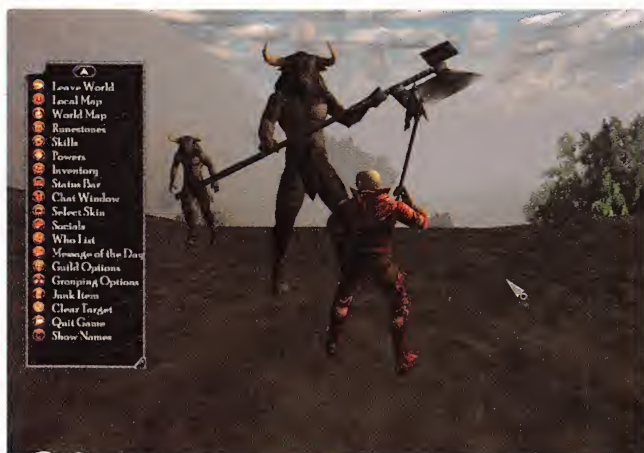
Easily the most satisfying comic-to-film translation since the first TMNT movie, Brian Singer creates an all too believable near-future world. With Mankind on the brink of a new evolutionary spurt, the best the establishment can do is try to legislate against it. Gah, it's Napster all over again! If you've somehow missed this one then wait no longer. The handful of flat performances are far outweighed by Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen as Wolverine, Professor X and Magneto. With the option of re-



integrating deleted scenes, and a replete battery of extras, this disc is a tempting purchase for any fan.

SCORE ★★★★★

SHADOWBANE



DEVELOPER

WolfPack Studios

AVAILABLE

When it's done

PUBLISHER

Take-Two Interactive

URL

<http://www.rage.co.uk/>

Shadowbane is one of the more promising online worlds for Australian gamers as arrangements have already been made to service it locally with a server either here or in Malaysia. The game's theme is fantasy and its design has one very unique twist: support for large-scale strategy warfare. It's not RTS but the ability for players to do things like form massive armies of thousands of players and lay siege to castles!

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT



DEVELOPER

Mythic Entertainment

AVAILABLE

4th Qtr

PUBLISHER

TBA

URL

www.darkageofcamelot.com

Dark Age of Camelot is set in Europe's mythological past, incorporating Arthurian legends, Norse mythology, Irish Celtic lore and Morris dancing. Players can choose a character from one of the three realms: Albion, Midgard, or Hibernia, with each having its own unique classes and races to choose from. Every character in a player's realm is his friend - and everyone in an opposing realm is an enemy that can be attacked on sight. The overriding goal of the game is to make sure that your realm's relics are safe in their keep - and to go on raids to enemy territory to try and steal their relics and bring them home to your territory.

STAR WARS GALAXIES



DEVELOPER

Verant Interactive

AVAILABLE

When it's done

PUBLISHER

Sony

URL

starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com

You've probably scoured the planet for info on this one already but we couldn't leave it out now, could we? Galaxies is in the enviable position of having the most desirable gameworld in history - who doesn't want to be in Star Wars? The pressure on the developer to live up to everyone's expectations must be enormous. Galaxies will allow players to travel through space to different worlds, interact with characters from the films and books and basically live the Star Wars life, even become a Jedi or Dark Jedi if they have the ability.

MOTOR CITY ONLINE



DEVELOPER

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

November

PUBLISHER

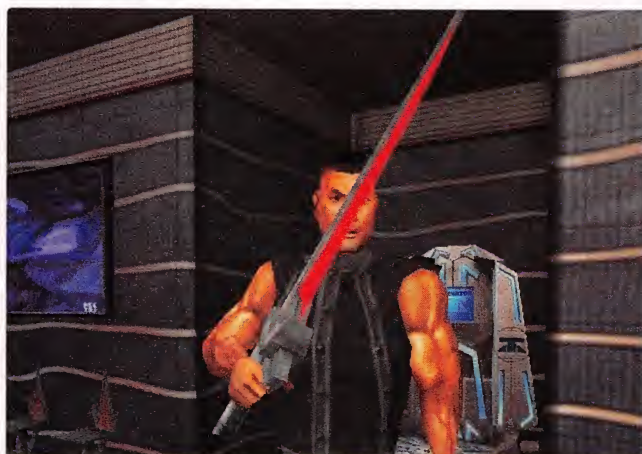
Electronic Arts

URL

www.motorcityonline.com

Certainly a candidate for most original online world, Motor City Online is a racing game that doesn't start and stop on the track. It will have two modes of play, one for instant racing action and the other for the more immersive game world of Motor City. Choose from over 50 licensed cars from the 1930s to the 70s and work them over with over a thousand different spares and upgrades. Race for cash, be in a hot rod gang or go cruisin' for simulated chicks.

PROJECT ENTROPIA



DEVELOPER

Mind Ark

AVAILABLE

When it's done

PUBLISHER

TBA

URL

www.project-entropia.com

Project Entropia is another example of the originality and creativity being put into online worlds as opposed to the ever increasing predictability of conventional gaming. Entropia is a very ambitious project that is creating a virtual world that will offer real world services, whatever that means. The main hook is the fact that players will build the sci-fi world of Entropia as they play. The game has an extensive technology based weapons system and the designers plan to have virtual currency that can be exchanged for real money and visa versa. This one is very hard to summarise in one paragraph so check out the website.

PLANETSIDE



DEVELOPER

Sony Online

AVAILABLE

2nd Qtr 2002

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

URL

www.station.sony.com/planetside

In the simplest terms, Planetside is Tribes 2 in a persistent gameworld, which can't be a bad thing. Planetside players will belong to one of the various empires within the game and one of the primary goals is to win and maintain control of continents comprised of different regions. As territories trade hands, the balance of power shifts, and players must do what they can to keep the balance tipped in favour of their respective empire. The game also supports vehicle and flight physics so players won't be footslogging everywhere. This looks like a great title for Tribes and Counter-Strike clanners who want to crank up the scale of their operations.

STATE OF PLAY ONLINE WORLDS

There's an old episode of *ST: The Next Generation* where the character of Reg Barclay becomes so obsessed with the Enterprise's holodeck (a virtual reality entertainment facility) that he begins to prefer it to the ineptitude and embarrassment of his daily life. There are times when all serious gamers feel the same way as poor old Reg, that's part of the attraction of escapism after all.

Of course the ultimate form of escapism is the persistent online gameworld (well, actually it's twelve months all expenses paid to the Bahamas with the female cast of *Coyote Ugly* and a few kegs of wet stuff, but who's that lucky?) and, even though it's taken a lot longer than many pundits first thought, more and more people are discovering the joys of casting aside their slender, pale husk and replacing it with all manner of elves, dwarves, warriors, wizards and, in the more exciting gameworlds, bakers, tailors and candlestick makers.

Now that fantasy titles such as *Everquest* and *Ultima Online* have laid the groundwork, developers with more imagination and courage are striking out in different directions, well mostly, to try and expand the genre and its audience. The first licensed online gameworld, and the most highly anticipated, is surely *Star Wars Galaxies*. Hopefully this won't be a unique event. Perhaps one day we'll see persistent online versions of *Terminator*, *Bladerunner*, *Spaghetti Westerns*, *Battletech* or even *Buffy*!

Unfortunately, while Americans can look forward to this brave new world without trepidation, Australians have something to worry about. As they say repeatedly in that annoying IBM ad: infrastructure. The bottom line is this: broadband bandwidth costs per month for MMOG servers in the US is approximately \$300. Here the same thing costs \$3000. That is why when companies talk about giving us a 'local' server they usually mean one in Malaysia or Singapore.

Not wanting to get too political, gamers incensed at this situation can thank our PM and his privatised Telstra. Now that our monopoly telco has to please shareholders with bigger profits every year, it does so by squeezing everything to within an inch of its life. Broadband transfer rates are capped, prices are artificially inflated and infrastructure is only upgraded to please the accountants rather than to suit the customers.

As the rest of the world enjoys the benefits of a fast and cheap Internet, as they revel in the intricacies of unparalleled gameworlds, we will be lost in the dark ages with our little 56k modems plugged into the Johnny Howard copper wire express. We can only hope that our political masters see sense, as they sit and watch the rest of the world leave us behind, and change things for the better.

George Soropos

Online Worlds

SINCE THE SUCCESS OF ULTIMA ONLINE AND EVERQUEST, IT SEEMS EVERYONE IS WORKING ON AN ONLINE WORLD THESE DAYS. BUT IS IT THE FUTURE OR JUST A FAD? THE PCPP CREW INVESTIGATES...

Moderator : David Wildgoose

Panel : Agata Budinska, Anthony Fordham, Daniel Staines, James Cottee, John Dewhurst

DW: So, who's interested in Online Worlds?

JC: I'm looking forward to Elite 4. That's supposed to be online. Elite 4 Online playing like the original, but with other humans. You suss out what you want to do, whether you want to do the trading, the violence or the bounty hunting. So there's room to explore - there's limited options but there's infinite possibility. I think that's what an online world should be.

DW: Anthony's just fallen asleep.

JC: I'd like to say at this point the stark surroundings behind us emphasise the reason why people immerse themselves in fantasy worlds to escape reality... What was the question again?

AF: I'm interested in Earth & Beyond because it is science fiction and all the others are fantasy.

JD: What about Star Wars Galaxies?

AF: Star Wars pretends to be sci-fi but really it's fantasy.

JD: I always think I'm interested in online worlds, but when it actually comes to playing them I find them quite dull.

DW: Didn't you enjoy Everquest? Surely it was a thrill to finally meet Prumpy...

JD: Er... yep. It was...

AF: But it's just so ugly.

JD: It doesn't really give you anything. I think the trials you experience in your daily life actually give you things that are beneficial. Whereas practicing stoneworking or something is...

DW: ...To improve your stats.

AF: It's so abstract.

JC: I've never actually played one, so this may sound like a stupid question. Is there actually anything to do in online worlds?

AF: Yes, there are server assigned quests.

JD: You can get player-killed.

save ourselves a lot of time.

DW: Why doesn't that argument apply to singleplayer games as well?

AF: I think you expect more from a multiplayer game.

DS: Online worlds so far have only been of an RPG nature. We've yet to see anything like Planetside that might change the gaming dynamic.

JD: If it's not RPG, if it's not stats-based, I think it would be different. Raising stats is the only impetus to play these games. If you could amass reputation in a different way then maybe player-killing wouldn't be a problem. Maybe the answer to player-killing is to do what they're doing in Galaxies and probably other games, where you have areas where you can't kill other players. But you go out into the boonies and you know you're going to get attacked.

DW: Designers need to find ways to encourage cooperation and provide an incentive for doing it.

JC: Has anyone played Phantasy Star Online?

JD: You can't play it in Australia.

DW: Phantasy Star Offline.

JC: You can connect to a US server, if you like.

AF: Did you know you can pull the white bits out of the carpet?

Boba Fett

DW: The fundamental problem with online worlds is that in a singleplayer game you are the hero, but you can't have a thousand heroes in an online world.

AB: I'm not looking forward to Galaxies because everyone is going to want to be Boba Fett.

AF: I don't want to be Boba Fett.

JC: Isn't he a clone anyway? You can have as many Boba Fetts as you want.

DW: Well, can you create an online world where everyone is a hero?

going to realise that they just can't function like a singleplayer game. It won't be like a singleplayer game for everyone in the same world.

DS: A big point of frustration is that in a singleplayer game you're in and - bang! - you're the hero. Whereas in an online world you've got to work your way up ranks and experience before you get to stage where you can play a role. A lot of people don't have the patience.

AB: A lot of people do, but then they find their real lives have dwindled away to nothing.

JC: I think you'll find that the people who do this don't have real lives to start with.

JD: What's the difference between that and The Sims?

AB: The Sims Online looks interesting because it's more about social interaction. There's an emphasis on succeeding and progressing but there's no kind of hero ideal. It's a community. I'm expecting it to work like a chat room.

JD: And that's a worry. At least in an RPG you're swinging a sword! In The Sims you're going to things that look like real places because you're too sad to go there in real life. It's even worse.

What's the point

DW: Do online worlds demand too much of our time because they're entrenched in RPG legacies?

JD: I don't think it's got anything necessarily to do with being an RPG. You've got so many people playing, the ones who are going to be able to get better than everyone else are going to have to spend an inordinate amount of time there.

DW: Why should it have to be about being better than everyone else? The Sims Online isn't about that.

JD: Maybe that's why it could be a better online world.

AB: It's going to be more community based, more interaction with other people, as opposed to who can you kill.

DS: But how's that going to work in terms of goals? What's the goal of logging onto Sims Online?

AB: Same as the The Sims...

DW: ...It's about enjoying the actual gameplay experience.

AB: It's about building your house, showing off what you can create. It's like a big fashion parade of houses, items, skins and so forth.

JC: Exactly. As physical ideals continue to increase as the physical reality of people continues to decline...

DW: Speak for yourself, James.

JC: People are getting fatter, no doubt about that. Over the next decade we're going to see Better Than Life. People won't improve their own lives, they'll just build model worlds where they can have a perfect world online.

The Sims Online looks interesting because it's more about social interaction. There's an emphasis on succeeding and progressing but there's no kind of hero ideal

Player-killing

AB: I remember when Ultima Online came out, I was like "Yay!" and got all excited. Playing it though were all these dickheads whose idea of fun was to kill your character and everyone who was weaker than them.

DW: Perhaps that's a symptom though, rather than the problem. Which is that there is nothing to do.

AF: Is player-killing the only real thing you can do? All these server-assigned quests are basically bollocks. If I have to run around and kill all these monsters for 400 gold, why don't you just give me 400 gold and we can

AB: If everyone's a hero then no one is a hero because everyone's back on the same level.

JD: Touche!

DW: Okay, how about where everyone can feel as if they're playing a part in the greater scheme of things. Isn't that what something like Planetside is doing by encouraging team-based combat?

JD: It's encouraging cooperation, certainly. You can share the glory, but your glory is not as high. I don't think everyone can be a hero. In ten years time, when we've got a model for how these things work, we're

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OPM
August 2000



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HAVE YOUR SAY

Join the debate in the PCPP Forum. We will be posting on the PCPP Forum the topic for each month's Roundtable. The best responses we receive will be published in the same issue alongside our own thoughts on the subject. Visit www.pcpowerplay.com.au/forums and jump into the thread headed The Roundtable.

Online worlds are working fine but they have numerous problems with hackers and Pker's which ruin it for most of the people. Apparently Star Wars Galaxies is going to overcome this but they're not saying how. I can't wait to see how they get round the hackers.

Nfi, Templar

For me, it comes down to lag. I know we can't get away from it, but with a slow connection it makes playing MP games, let alone a fully multiplayer world very hard and frustrating. If, however I had faster connection, I would play them. Games like Planescape look great to me, but the only thing stopping me getting them is my 56k.

Skidrowpunk, Skaarj

I am looking forward to Motor City Online and The Sims Online. At the moment I only know of online worlds that are RPGs. I hate RPGs. Give us gamers a wider choice and the number of people playing will go up.

the_jonesy, Skaarj

While I'm yet to experience online worlds, the main factors for me are time and money. I won a copy of Asheron's Call at a LAN Party in April, and looked forward to giving it a go (I'd heard good things about it). That was, until I found out that it was pay-to-play. Being a uni student, and now working part-time, I don't feel that paying for the right to play a game is justified, considering I don't have the time to devote to it.

Melkior, Tiedling

Personally, I never got into the whole online world thing. There is one thing missing in an online world that makes it so undesirable - reality. When I talk to someone, I don't want text, I want voices and all that stuff. I'm waiting for an online world that is just that. I should be able to chuck on my VR glasses and take a stroll down a mall in a city - a mall where people are hired in shops, where there is a government, where there is vanilla ice cream. Until that day, I'll stick to reality - or at least these forums.

Steeley, Peacemaker General

Anyone ever play a MUD? Very popular a few years ago, but like the text adventure have been replaced by graphical MMORPGs. They serve a purpose as an escape from reality, but many of us would prefer not to escape and have more realistic games.

ReapermanRS, Tiedling

For me connections are a big thing, as I don't have cable (sob...sob), and I don't wish to be sitting and playing a slow online game. One thing that doesn't appeal to me about The Sims Online is that it seems like a lifestyle game. I enjoy the quick match of Red Alert, Starcraft and FPS games; but a game like Sims Online sounds pretty much like a day-to-day game, and I don't have the time playing games as it is.

CLL, Tiedling

I would enjoy playing them as long as you could see players that you had already met in the game constantly, ie not just two or three but dozens, and

where not just fights take place but also just talking. The main concern me thinks is that there are always too many god-like characters in all games who crush everyone. A limit to how high you can make yourself should be made or you only play with characters around your skill level.

Orion, Peon

In my opinion, bandwidth/stability is the main hurdle in the massive online worlds that a lot of us dream about. I'd give it about 5-10 years before it can be taken seriously as a real alternative to the way we can play games now.

Mowerman, Templar

I think the problem with a lot of online games is that they don't take team play to a new level. I want to fight for a cause (and let's face it most games involve fighting) along side hundreds of others.

The way to achieve this is to force characters to play on a team, eg. dwarves or elves or humans. If they kill one of their own then they suffer massive consequences; kill the enemy and you are rewarded. There could be a ranking system to climb with the big-wigs making diplomatic decisions that might affect the whole world (like forging an alliance with the elves or something). I want to read a news board in my home city and realise that soldiers are needed to defend our northern outpost, gather up a group of fellow players, head out there and take down our most hated enemy.

Fatty Lumpkin, Grunt

DS: Isn't that a bit unhealthy?

JC: It's the beginning of the end.

AF: Back to point about who's got the biggest knob in The Sims. Isn't that what an online RPG is about anyway?

DW: If The Sims Online is all about earning more money and progressing through a career path, then it's exactly the same as any online RPG.

JD: I think it would be interesting if people could decide to be proprietors of a disco, and the guy who's a corporate guy can come in on the weekend and find his wife. As long as people are doing much more realistic and diverse things, then it will be a more interesting world.

The death knell

DW: What should death mean in an online world?
[silence]

JC: Pain.

JD: You're paying a monthly fee, so people don't want to die. They'll just go 'I've been supporting this company for so many months, and then I just got whacked'. It'd be unethical for someone to lose all their experience, if that's what they're paying all this money for.

DW: But doesn't that argument then underline the inadequacy of the basic gameplay?

JD: I'm with you, they're definitely inadequate.

AB: If you're in a fantasy world like Everquest, I think the items that you had on you when you die should be passed on to your children. It should be waiting for you when you start up a new character. When you log in it says "You have been bequested this from your great grandfather".

DW: Something that adds context...

AB: Yeah, so it adds to the story. You still die and have to start again, but with a bit of a headstart.

JD: And if someone doesn't lose anything from dying then maybe player-killing wouldn't happen in the first place. There's no novelty to killing all the weak characters in the game.

DW: Which is a good thing, surely.

JD: Anthony?

AF: What?

AB: Has anyone played UO recently? When you die don't you turn into a ghost and have to visit a shrine to be resurrected?

JD: I've ignored it recently.

More ramblings

DS: How's it going to work in The Sims Online? Can your Sim die?

AB: We don't know yet.

DS: It would be cool if they did. It would add a time constraint, which means you would be forced to do

more interesting things.

JD: Maybe someone wants to sit in a rocking chair for 40 years and perfect their rocking chair skill...

AB: Death would increase the importance of relationships, so you'd have to have kids to pass things down to.

JD: Hang on, is this something that anyone here wants to do?

AB: I'd like to play The Sims Online just from having played the others for ridiculous lengths of time.

JD: Online worlds in general?

DW: I'd like something like Planetside because human opponents make for more interesting AI.

AF: The abstract idea of an online world attracts me, but the reality is a whole bunch of lame Americans deliberately being arrogant little shits to each other.

AB: The equivalent of a frat party online...

JD: With people who don't get invited to a frat party. Is that a problem for online worlds? They have such a bad rep because of the stereotype of people who play them?

DW: So we want an online world where people roleplay because we think that's more interesting. Yet we think people who do this are wasting their lives because they should be living in the real world?

AF: The ideal of roleplaying is interesting. The reality of roleplaying is less interesting.

JC: Fortran smash!

The logo for Deliverance Software features a stylized orange 'd' with a yellow halo, followed by the word 'eliverance' in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. Below this, the word 'SOFTWARE' is written in a smaller, orange, all-caps, sans-serif font.

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INBOX

PLATINUM PG

The **LETTER OF THE MONTH** writer wins a game from Ozisoft's Platinum range of titles. Available in Platinum this month are Deathtrap Dungeon, Tomb Raider, Outcast, Imperium Galactica 2, TA: Kingdoms, Wheel of Time, and Le Mans 24 Hours.

Letters Topic: Should Anthony get a haircut?

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

ARTICLE/REVIEW

So, you guys have gotten some bad PR and lost some street cred for that Tiberian Sun review (and possibly Black & White).

But what, in your opinion, was the greatest article/review that you have written? One that correctly predicted the industry trend weeks/months in advance or even inspired a whole new trend.

Jack Banh

All of them? To name one specifically, our recent feature on LAN cafes has generated plenty of positive feedback.

ALL HOTSEATABLE

Once upon a time, it was a very rare occurrence to have a game not hotseatable. Just about every arcade, racing and turn-based game were all hotseatable. Where did it all go? Sure we now have networks and internets and what-not, but is there anything cheaper and more fun than you and a few mates playing Worms all night until your eyes are so red from coke and TV rays you look like some sort of pitiful demon. Or what about playing Master of Orion 2 for a straight week without food, water or the outside world, living off pure patience alone, until the Antarans or the scammin' Silicoids kicked your arse? Will there once again be the reigning glory of party fun? Or is it gone forever?

Evan McMahon

It probably says more about the decline in racing and turn-based games in recent years. Civilization 3, Heroes of Might & Magic IV and Master of Orion 3 may signal a renaissance.

RELATION TO LARA

Has anyone thought of what the "JC" in JC Denton stands for? It could be a reference to Jesus Christ because they each have a role as a saviour. Or maybe the C is Croft and he is a distant relation to Lara, meaning that only people with Croft blood can defeat the Illuminati (as in a recent movie...)?

Luke Rossiter

Given the game's title, it's an obvious nod toward the former. Nice hypertextual reference, though.

ALREADY PURCHASED

Recently, when I was browsing the local EB, I saw Blue Shift for Half-Life on sale. My eyes lit up, for this was what I had been waiting for. But, when more closely examined, I saw that included with Blue Shift was Opposing Force.

Now I have no problem with this, except for the fact that

I have already purchased Opposing Force, and I definitely do not want two copies of the same game. I find this unfair to those who have already purchased OF. Although I understand that some files might be required from the OF game, and that both HL and OF are required to play (or something to that effect), there should be a version for those who have already purchased the earlier expansion.

This also happened with EverQuest expansion (Ruins of Kunark) as well, the game shipping only with the original EverQuest.

Why do the companies do this to their customers? Is this rewarding to those who have already purchased their game?

Such companies should be a bit more considerate to their loyal customers - unless you can shed a view to change my mind...

Jonathon White

The sales of Blue Shift would seem to vindicate the decision, at least in Sierra's eyes.

RUNAWAY SUCCESS

A few passing comments in PCPP give me the impression that the writers of this mag have developed a distaste for Counter-Strike (an understatement I think). Sure everyone has to move on from a game eventually (don't tell the guys at my local network gaming venue), but are you shying away because CS has become such a huge runaway success with the public - is it too popular? It's tough when your favourite unknown band goes popular, but if the games industry heavies (Ed Fries from Microsoft, for example) are going to push for the 'mainstream' then isn't this something us 'hardcore gamers' are going to have to deal with?

Patrick Donelan

Hey, we like Counter-Strike. Why did you think otherwise?

ROLEPLAYING CATEGORY

I like my adventures to be free of orcs, dwarfs, hobbits and magic! Fallout was the game - from the retro graphics in the manual to the attitude of my character. Jagged Alliance 2 was the same, with even more attitude. Some characters wouldn't cooperate and just walked off in the middle of a mission.

There is a theme here, which stems from my first boxed PC game - UFO Enemy Unknown. That was gaming. I have played all three X-Com games until the grooves on the CDs wore out. (They do have grooves, don't they?) My other passion is WW1 flight sims, Planes have to have propellers and if possible, two wings. Red Baron on a creaking 486SX 33MHz Packard Bell from K-Mart

FROM THE FORUMS

www.pcpowerplay.com.au/forums

Movies are market targeted Lowest Common Denominator slime (SwordFish, Tomb Raider anyone?). TV is vainly trying to be "for everyone". Computer games are targeted but when the player is playing one the effect is "this world is for me!". People like that. I know I do. Freedom. Going mainstream will be great for the gaming industry. However it won't be for us, the dare I say hardcore gamers.

So enjoy it while you can. Because soon your parents and sisters will be markets just as important as you. Fear the day. Games will become simplistic and open-ended, with no failure. You will be forgotten. Fear the day

**Arach
Templar**

Some highly paid actors, like Tom Hanks, are actually worried that computer generated actors will be taking their jobs.

I think that computer generated actors are better than real actors. they are more pliable to the movie, they can be made to fit the movie, the movie doesn't have to fit them...

What do you think about CG actors?

**BRooDED
Skarrj**

The effect on YOUNG children from HIGHLY realistic graphic violence in games won't be known for quite a few years yet. I'm quite certain there will be some effect on a number of young individuals. Saying that gaming violence doesn't have any effect on anybody is being ignorant of a potentially dangerous situation. That's why there is a rating system for gaming software, unfortunately, there are some irresponsible parents/retailers out there who don't maintain them.

**grjohnson
Templar**

Hmm...ranks hey..

Well then this should be interesting...I think it will be good and bad. I have been here since the beginning too. But there is no way that I will even come close to having the same amount of posts as Wog boy!

The good bit: Adds new life to the forums..

The bad bit: Spammers..!

**Anakha
Tiefing**



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World Cyber Games Australian Preliminaries **26th September 2001**

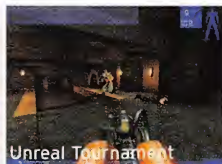
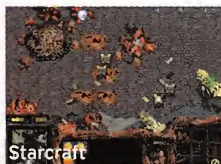
NSW & ACT - i Star Zone Level B1 841 George St Sydney (near UTS)

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Full coverage in PCPP#68



Empire Earth: yes it really is "that good with the graphics!"

was my introduction to flight sims. Dawn Patrol, Flying Corp and Red Baron 2 & 3D followed. My P2-300MHz with 3D Blaster Banshee and Precision Pro joystick was purchased and setup just for this game. Still is, but the enforced technology hoop jumping has made that redundant now.

Anyway, the point of this is, I read your Hall of Fame charts in the August issue. In the roleplaying category I see two games I value. With a quirky twist of fate I see Planescape: Torment for \$30 in a recently opened store in my town. Trusting your opinion, I bought it, even though it had magic in it. Thanks for the three consecutive 3am gaming sessions in Beechworth in winter with no heater! Great gaming experience, the story, the visuals, and yes, I suppose magic does have a place in a game!

While on a roll, I picked up Mig Alley at Harvey's for \$20. No props and set in Korea! No way could this be good. Being No.1 on your Flight Sim list, I thought I would give it a cynical trial run. I forced my son off the computer, installed the game and attempted to land a Sabre Jet. With my 13 year old next to me ("You don't need manuals Dad, you just figure it out!") we flew and immersed ourselves for the next four hours. So thanks I think. My son's logic now suggests that we should get all five games in any category that we like. I have been a PC PowerPlay reader since #1 and have taken notice of your opinion.

The real reason I wrote was to ask the reviewer of Train Simulator if he failed to notice the subtle innuendo, in fine print, that Train Simulator was a simulation of driving a train, not an action adventure first-train shoot 'em up. It simulates driving a train, which in conversation with a real train driver amounts to starting a train and stopping it, in between counting a lot of telephone poles!

Bill Arnold

I think the Hall of Fame is a winner, then.

OH LORDY!

I'm writing about Sin. A wonderful game indeed. Sin was

released November 1998 and failed due to its atrocious buggyness, oh lordy! Well, anyway, the game is now in its 1.03 patch and is chugging beautifully, like it should have upon release. (*Chugging?* - Ed.)

Thus it is a game to give a look, for if it had not been as buggy it probably would have taken Half-Life's place at the throne of best singleplayer game ever. A high claim but I make it freely, and with full confidence. This game had a deeper storyline than Half-Life, insane amounts of interaction and cool enemies.

Goran Grce

Mad as a cut snake, we say.

GOOD WITH THE GRAPHICS

I was wondering about Empire Earth. Is it really that good with the graphics? And what rating would you give the game for an RTS fan? And when is it coming out in Australia (try to be exact)?

Rik Perry

We're planning a huge feature on Empire Earth in

the next couple of issues, so you'll see exactly how good it looks then. It's on track for a pre-Christmas release.

DEDICATED A COUPLE

What has happened to Team Fortress 2? Sierra Studios (www.sierrastudios.com/games/teamfortress) hasn't reported anything new in months, you guys haven't mentioned it since last year (maybe even the year before) and it has slipped from the top of your Australia's Most Wanted list into nothingness.

I remember one PCPP where you actually included it in your preview section (*It was previewed in PCPP#42 and we interviewed Robin Walker in PCPP#44 - Fact-checking Ed*). You dedicated a couple of pages to it. But since then... nothing. What's going on? Is it still in progress? What's the current release date (the last date I heard was mid 2000)? Why aren't you talking about it?

Shane O'Dowd

We aren't talking about it because Valve isn't talking about it. Team Fortress 2 is still in development - rumours suggest the scale of the game has been ramped up immeasurably since the success of the similar Counter-Strike - but it's release date has slipped way off the radar. Don't expect it until at least 2003.

GIRLFRIEND CRAZYMINX

Recently you have included in your glorious magazine an addition that not everyone agreed with - this addition was Dr. Claw. The first few times I read his contribution to the magazine I was outraged I couldn't let it continue. I thought it was blatant mis-use of precious pages in PCPP. But he has redeemed himself recently. I purchased the latest issue where he jokes about his girlfriend crazyminx. It was actually amusing. If he can keep that kind of stuff up he would become a "welcome addition" to PCPP.

James Paterson

Speaking of dr claw, most of the complaints received concerning his addition have centred around his inability to spell or punctuate properly. With predictable irony, the vast majority of complainants haven't been able to spell or punctuate properly. Does it cut too close to the bone?

LETTER OF THE MONTH

TYPICAL KNEE-JERK REACTION

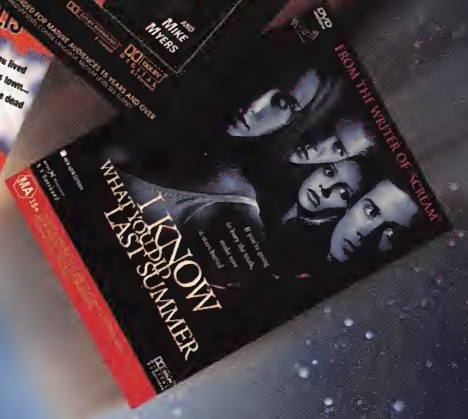
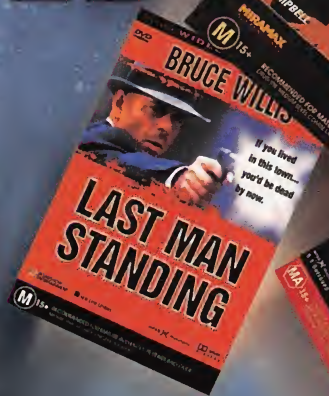
It was with disbelief that I read your report in PCPP#62 that games developers were to be sued by the families of the victims of the Columbine massacre. Whilst my heart goes out to those who suffered because of this tragedy the fact of the matter is this, those two boys had severe emotional problems which can't be blamed solely on the violence in games. The real questions are who let them get to the point where they were ready to kill and how did they obtain those weapons? It is a typical knee-jerk reaction to lay blame on easy targets and to avoid accepting responsibility.

America had 32,000 gun deaths last year but no one is questioning how easy it is to obtain firearms. God forbid they ever lose the constitutional right to bear arms. If a man is drunk behind the wheel and kills someone because of it, you blame the man. You don't blame the brewery for putting alcohol in his drink or the dealer who sold him his car. It is time that parents stopped blaming so called bad influences and started to accept responsibility for their own children. It is up to parents, not developers, to monitor what children are witnessing in the games they play.

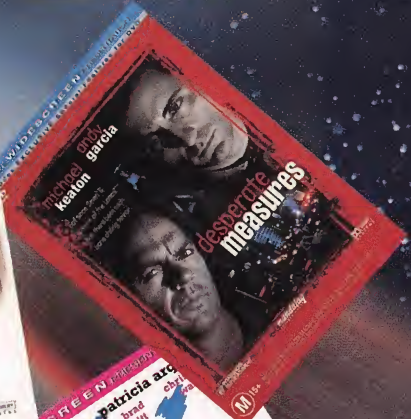
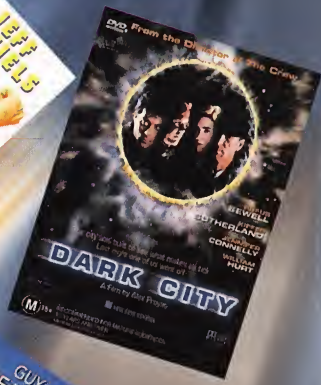
Jeremy Randerson

DVD @

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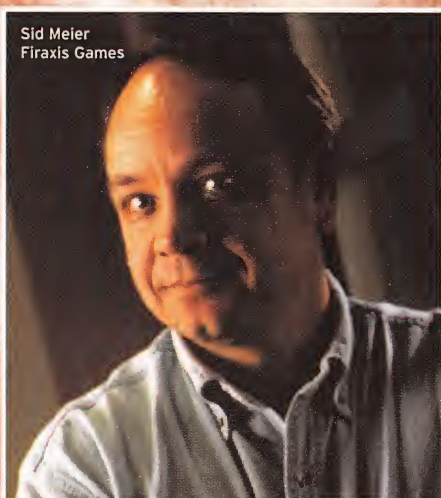
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BRAVE NEW WORLD

“ We're in a fortunate position with Civ III because we've had a tremendous amount of player feedback over the years, that has helped us shape the game. Our goal has been to keep the things that people have loved in Civ and Civ II (the light-hearted fun elements of Civ, the depth of Civ II), refine and improve them and add many new features and ideas we've gathered from years of Civ player feedback. We've done just that and think that Civ III is the best Civ experience ever. ”





Sid Meier
Firaxis Games

The most anticipated strategy title in the history of gaming is upon us. For some members of the Firaxis team, *Civilization III* is the culmination of more than ten years in the strategy game business. This is the latest revision of a format that has maintained a reputation for the finest turn-based strategy on the PC.

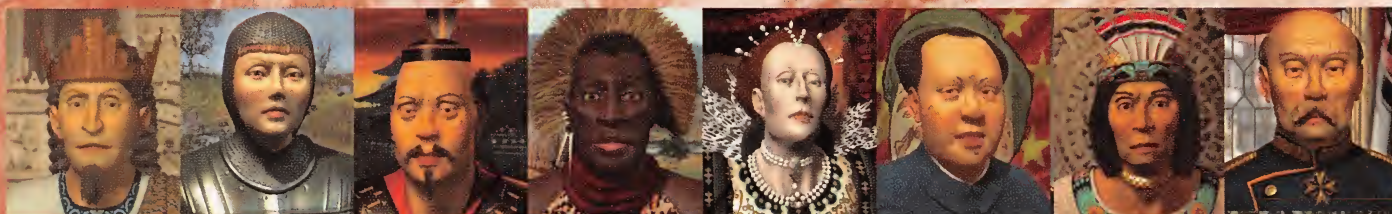
Sid Meier has spoken exclusively with PCPowerPlay, to lift the lid on the concepts of *Civilization III*. For those who stepped in late, Meier is a towering figure in games development, the man behind a host of strategy titles that range from great titles to genre makers. He is up there with Romero, Carmack, Molyneux, Spector and Wright in games royalty and he inspired the term "Meierised" (indicating a game where the developer's name is added to a product, such as Sid Meier's *Alpha Centauri*).

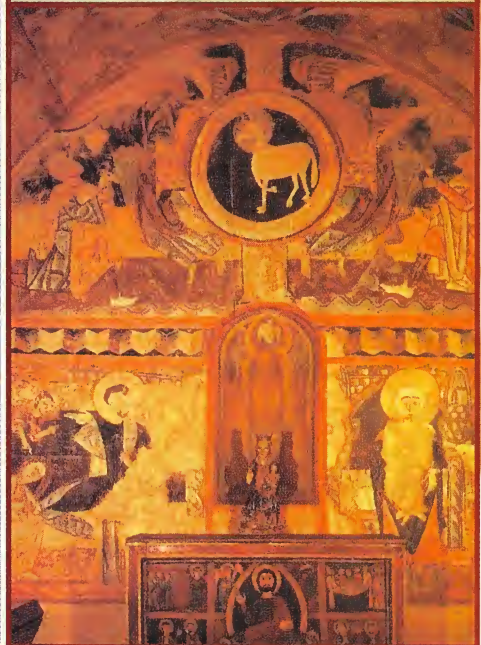
Jeff Briggs, Associate Producer and other members of Firaxis share their enthusiasm in detailing the inner workings of this long-awaited sequel and explain the inspiration for their design decisions. PCPowerPlay has been fortunate enough to play an entirely exclusive pre-release version of *Civilization III* - the only copy in Australia. While only 70% complete, this playtest proved that the spirit of Civ is recreated in all its glory.

The basic game screen is almost identical to *Civ II* or *Alpha Centauri*, the turn-based mechanics, the keyboard shortcuts and available

units are all much the same. At first glance, *Civilization III* is not markedly different from its forebears. But Firaxis have introduced new levels of depth to the familiar Civ experience. The exciting, subtle depth of *Civilization III* is detailed in this, our exclusive feature preview.

One phrase that passes Jeff Briggs lips more than twice as we discuss Civ III is "taking it to a whole new level". Briggs explains: "We were able to do that by emphasising three areas of development. One is Culture - a whole new concept that has a tremendous effect on the gameplay. Another is Trade. Trade is a real integrated part of the game, where you really have to deal with other civilisations to trade and it makes a difference to trade inside your own civilisation. The third thing is Diplomacy. I can't tell you how many letters we've got from people saying how they wished diplomacy was more flexible, open-ended, more aggressive (If the player wants to be aggressive through the diplomacy system). And we've worked on all of those things."





SID SAYS

"Civ is an empire building game that challenges the player to rewrite history as they explore the earth, build their civilization, conquer some of history's greatest leaders and eventually rule the world."



Perhaps the most revolutionary change to the world of Civilization is the cultural aspects of controlling an empire. While making armies to squash your trade partners is always a sign of progressive government, military might isn't everything: just think of the Pyramids or Greek theatre. A culture has influence according to all of its achievements, so Firaxis have made culture much more integral to Civilization. The traditional benefits of a stronger, happier, more productive population still result from building granaries, temples and other improvements but national borders are now created as a result of the level of culture in each civilisation. Accordingly, cultural power and military power are directly connected.

Briggs discusses the concept: "Borders come into existence by the player investing in culture. What that means is building improvements in the cities that reflect cultural values like for example libraries, courthouses, cathedrals, temples that reflect religious, artistic and philosophical values

of the civilisation. When [the player] builds up enough culture in one city he gets borders around that city. When he builds some more the borders get wider and wider around each of the cities until if there's nobody else in the world, you control the whole world."

The obvious contrast is with Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri. In that game, territory would begin at its largest and outside expansion would come to encroach in on it. The reverse is true in Civilization III, which has a more organic and logical approach to growth. Territory can expand and contract depending on the cultural "war" going on in each civilisation's development.

Briggs points out that: "Not only do cities of weak culture sometimes join neighbouring strong culture civs, but you can literally flood their territory with yours, swallowing their cities whole. The penalty for this is the maintenance costs. An interesting element of this kind of peaceful expansion is nationality. Citizens of cities that are taken through war are slowly eliminated, but major

cities can be captured unscathed through culture. However, while they are willing to join your nation, these citizens maintain their nationality of origin, causing all kinds of problems. For instance, espionage missions against cities of your nationality enjoy an increased chance of success. The cultural victory condition is the ultimate turtle player's road to success. Get a city with a size 6 territory radius and you've done it (much, much, MUCH harder than it sounds)."

Civilization III offers both traditional combat and cultural expansionism (amongst others) as means to victory. The two cannot be used exclusively - a balance must be struck. A cultural mecca without defence is a lost city. Equally a military powerhouse with no culture fails to benefit from the surrounding terrain. The opportunities for varying strategies - from these two elements alone - are enormous.



Culture's impact on territory affects not just military might but resource gathering as well. The larger the city radius, the more land and resources are available. These resources fuel civilization growth: trade, research, production. Civilization III is one big circle.

Meier explains the concept: "Territory represents areas of land that your civilization dominates. With regards to the military, this is land in which the enemy cannot build or access improvements (such as roads) and land from which he can be ejected. With regards to trade, territory determines whether or not a colony is required to exploit a good and can be used in diplomacy in place of the more detailed world map."

Occupied land is extremely valuable and it can be used in many different ways: diplomatically, for resource gathering and for trade. At the same time, maintaining that land will prove the true art form. However, in battle, an enemy unit has control of the square it occupies. This means that resources normally

gained from that square are unavailable. While past versions of Civilization placed ultimate importance on cities themselves, Civ III will redress this by making every other square almost as valuable.

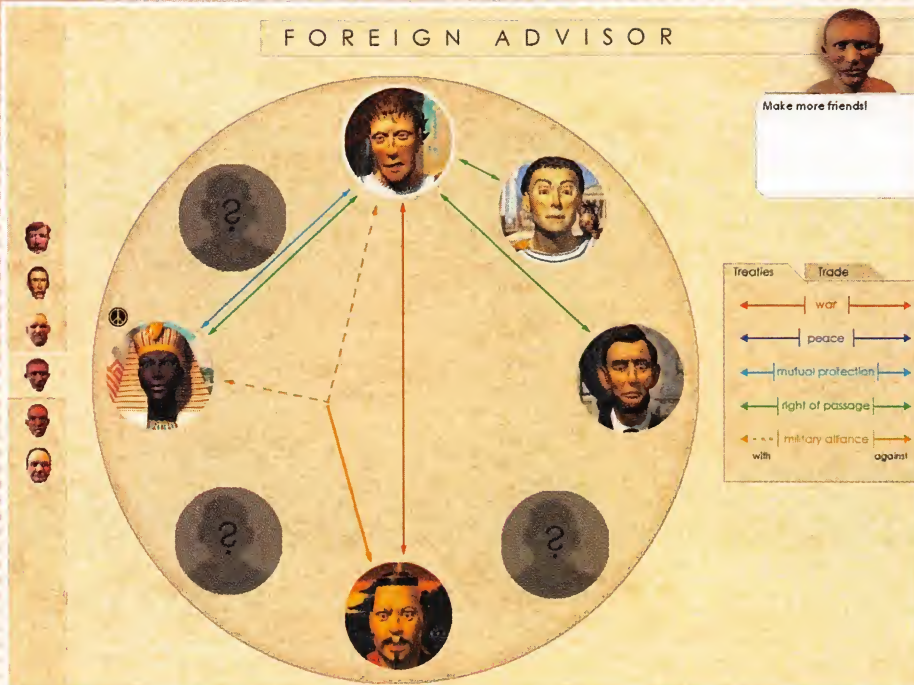
As research brings new resources to the player's attention, these resources appear randomly around the world. This could be within the player's territory or that of an opponent - or on a continent uninhabited. The value of a large empire improves over time as these resources become available. Territory is naturally connected to the trade aspect in this way.

Briggs is eager to point out that "Territory is always outside the fog of war and is easier to maintain. A definite bias lies with the defender, since the attacker cannot make use of infrastructure benefits. The use of roads is exclusive to allies, wider borders mean that military invaders will find it more difficult to reach big cities. It's a rare game where you can both culturally and military acquire new territory."

STOP THE POP

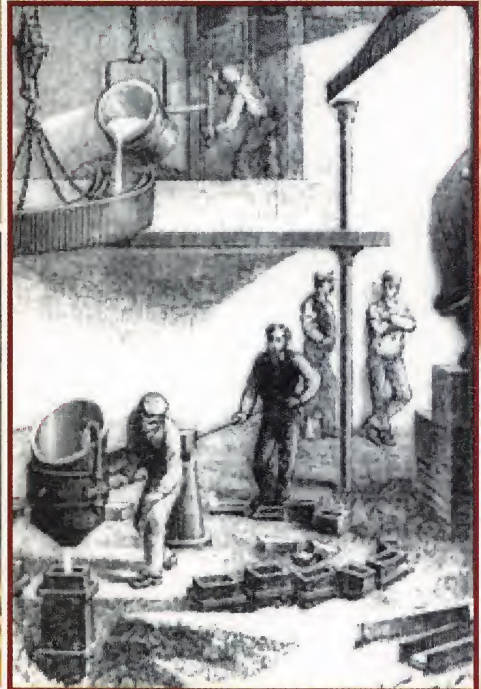
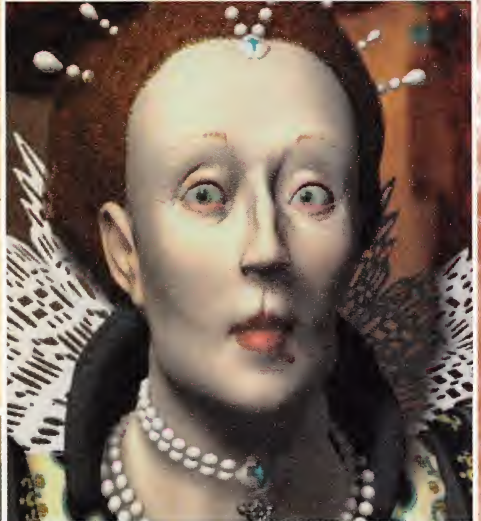
Pop-up screens were one of the best arguments that Civilization II was imperfect. Briggs explains how Firaxis improved this element with Civ III: "We broke all popups into three categories. Those localized to an area, but require no user input, now appear on the map itself, near the area of focus. Those that were not localized to an area, but still didn't require user interaction became advisor messages. The last kind, those that require some user interaction (such as a picking a new advance to research), still stop the game. The boon of this system is that approximately 2/3rds of the game stopping information windows no longer stop the game."

FOREIGN ADVISOR



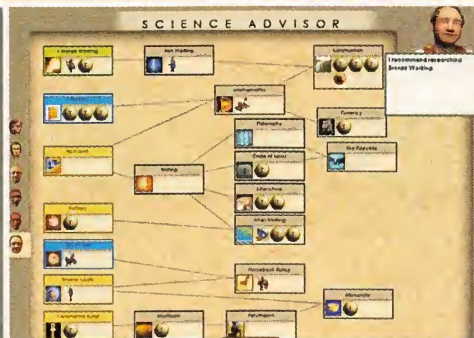
SID SAYS

Our historical research for Civ III revolved around the new features we've put in the game like new technologies, culture, expanded diplomacy, more intricate trade system, more powerful combat options, and how the interaction of all of these elements has impacted civilizations throughout history.



BRIGGS SAYS

You may remember that you had a luxury slider bar that you allocated a certain amount of money to keep people happy. Well that slider bar is gone and has been replaced by the trade system.



Trade is another facet of Civilization III that has changed significantly. Resources within your city radius need only a road to the city to be available for use. Then that resource can be used for unit production and trade. In fact, without certain resources, producing some units is impossible.

Within an empire, trade occurs automatically between connected cities. Trade routes are the roads themselves. Connected cities create a network of available resources from which units can be built, or traded with other civilisations. Should a city's roads (trade routes) be cut off, it can only make use of the resources in its radius.

It's unlikely that all the resources required to rule the world are available to a single player in their part of the world. This means that trade between nations is essential and trade alliances

become much more important to basic management of cities. Briggs explained that "trade forces players to stabilise continental arrangements that they come to rely on in all facets of gameplay. Unless you're very lucky, you must participate in cordial relationships with a few of your neighbours. Without this, you won't be able to do more than crawl through the eras."

Commodities satisfy different needs within a civilization. There are the basic resources that are more commonly found on the map. There are also luxury resources that play a role in the happiness of the people in a city. Briggs: "Also as your borders expand, they begin to encompass luxury items like for example, grapes which are used to make wine, wine is used to make people happy.

Briggs discusses another variety of resource:

"Now you can also trade other commodities which we call strategic resources, these are pretty important because they allow you to build certain units in the game. You can't build swordsmen unless you have iron and iron appears on the map somewhere as soon as you develop iron working. As soon as you know about iron working then you start to notice iron deposits on the map."

In Civ II, trade and infrastructure was quite distinct - caravans could be attacked while roads could be left in tact. There is less definition between these two facets. Briggs offers this in explanation: "Trade routes are always utilizing existing infrastructure, so attacking those is how you interrupt the routes." Seasoned fans should welcome this change, especially in the later stages of the game.



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The last area of significant change in the mechanics of Civilization is in the diplomatic arena. For the first time, a robust diplomatic system has been introduced to Civilization. Briggs reveals the interest in this facet of the game: "I can't tell you how many letters we've got from people saying how they wished diplomacy was more flexible, open-ended, more aggressive (If the player wants to be aggressive through the diplomacy system). And we've worked on all of those things."

The player comes face to face with other leaders, where various statements and responses can be selected to communicate. A nice improvement is the inclusion of subtle responses that communicate as much through the actual content as through the context. This lends a conversational tone to diplomatic proceedings.

Not only do the meetings with other leaders feature realistic dialogue and changing facial expressions that reflect the situation but also an impressive bargaining table that allows the player to trade virtually anything in treaties. Available for trade is Information, Resources, including luxury commodities and gold (lump sum or by turn),

technology and even cities. This allows the player much greater latitude in negotiations, in an effort to maintain diplomatic agreements.

This system also provides a far more flexible range of treaties for realistic diplomatic situations. These range from peace and right of passage to military alliances and war. The whole gamut is available for use and necessary for success.

Diplomacy is so intertwined with trade and war, that it is virtually unavoidable. Briggs says: "Playing a straight military game in this type of environment means alliances, which means some diplomatic finesse is required. Likewise, it's entirely possible to have another nation fight all of your wars for you. You have to be careful not to fall too far behind this kind of ally (they're often taking and keeping cities for instance), but if you've got the gold or goods, you can play a fairly sophisticated "puppet master" style game."

The Foreign Advisor screen paints the fairly sophisticated world situation in an easily comprehended circle diagram. All the world leaders' heads are displayed and their relationships (to each other and the player) are explained by connecting lines. Mutual alliances against a

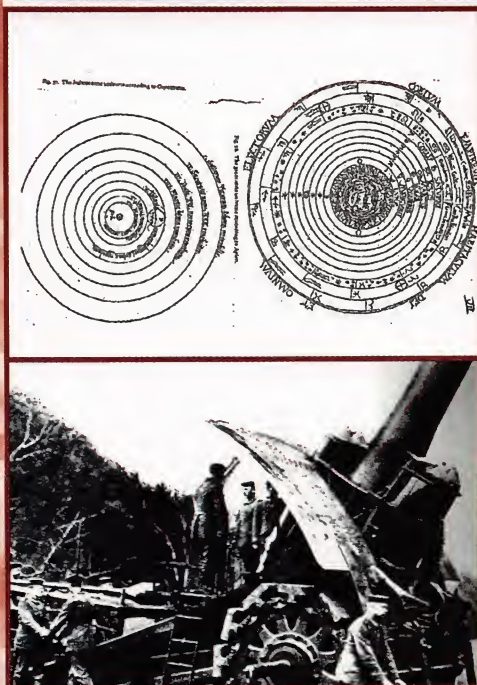
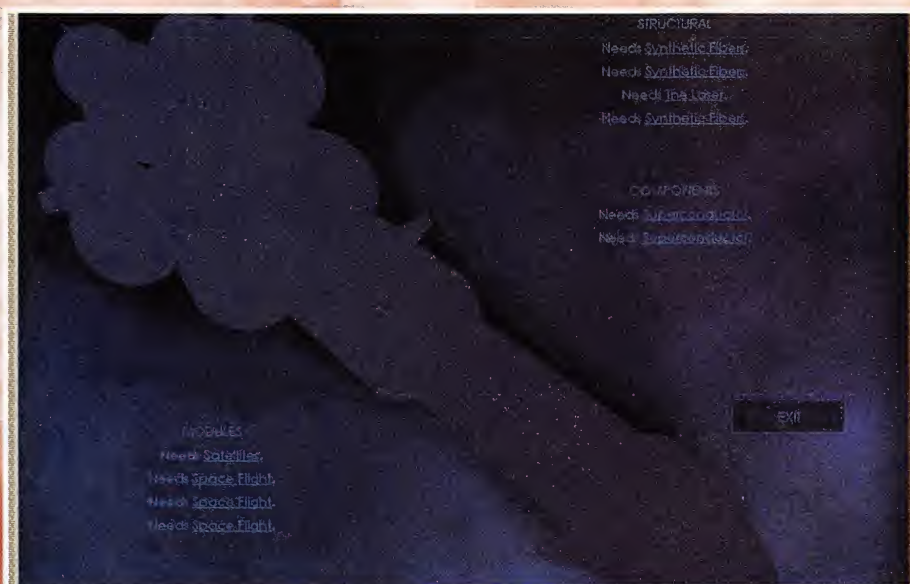
DEATH OF WONDERS MOVIE

Nick Rusko-Berger, Lead Artist, Firaxis Games

We decided not to have wonder movies in Civ III mainly because we've spent a lot of time creating this beautiful immersive world and the wonder movies take you out of the world and interrupt gameplay. The decision was influenced by feedback from Civ players. There will be some very cool in-game visual rewards when you build a wonder. The rest of the game is chock-full of beautiful character animation.

common enemy and trade embargoes are easily represented and hence understood. This is a good example of the level of simplicity that is present in Civilization III.

It's also nice to see a level of humour in diplomacy. While there is definitely the capabilities for serious play, the good natured responses of Queen Elizabeth, Abe Lincoln and the rest, keep the mood light and playful - after all, this is a game.



Firaxis has updated the visuals in Civilization III while maintaining the familiar look and feel that is so central to the Civilization experience. The world screen is extremely detailed with some 1200 different tiles being produced for the game. Individual units are now rendered in 3D and feature unique animations for movement and battle. The result is a livelier, visually exciting screen. The image of turn-based games being static has been subverted.

Nick Rusko-Berger, Lead Artist of Firaxis Games discusses the inspiration for design in Civilization III: "I had recently run across a book that had the very famous 'Tower of Babel' by Pieter Brueghel on the cover, and I was bowled over by it. Though the painting dates from the 1560's, it has an incredibly timeless quality that reminded me of a lot of postmodernism that you see in art, design, and architecture today. [This Brueghel image is on our cover] If there was a look and feel question, we'd consult old Pieter; if it would work in his world, it would work in ours.

The advisor screens present much the same information as in past versions of the game. They are functional and comprehensive, giving relevant details in a bare minimum of menu screens.

Rusko-Berger elaborates: "When designing the interface I kept in mind 3 things: functionality, simplicity, and readability... remove unnecessary tiling art for menu bars and interface bars, and just float things on top of the main map to give people more in-game experience and fewer distractions."

Each advisor "manages" a respective information screen: domestic, military, science, foreign, trade. While viewing the lowdown on the trade situation, your trade advisor will offer some opportune advice. Advisors will appear and give counsel at other pivotal moments as well. For example, during crumbling diplomatic negotiations when war is on the cards, your military will appear and tell you whether war is a good idea.

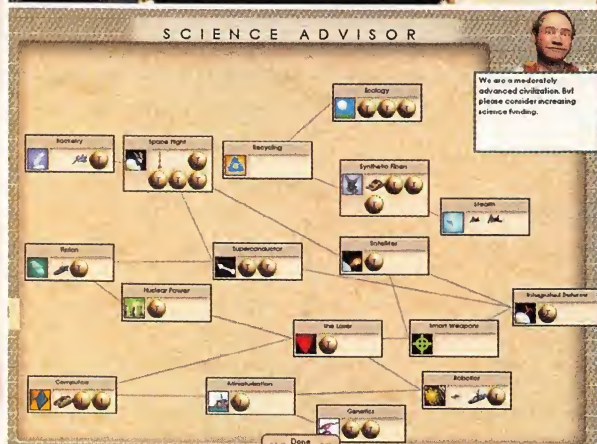
SID SAYS

Sid says: Our primary focus is always on making the gameplay fun. We use the latest bells and whistle only if they enhance gameplay. We built an entirely new graphics engine for Civ III through which we've created the best visual experience ever.

THE SOUND OF PROGRESS

Mark Cromer, Sound Designer, Firaxis Games Audio for Civ III has been much improved from audio in Civ II. Units will have sfx that are mixed on the fly with pitch and volume randomization so they sound different and time perfectly. There is much more music than in Civ II and the music starts interactive with a new game. For example, each time the player builds a city or a unit, the music changes to reflect this.





Morris describes armies: "They function similarly to transports, except that units 'loaded' into them are capable of relieving each other. Created by leaders or the Military Academy small wonder, they are dominating entities on the battlefield. In order to eliminate a unit in an army you need to defeat ALL it's member units, and



they can be very tough opponents."

"We have leaders in the game, which function as focal points of 'will and leadership'. They are created from elite level units who get promoted in battle, and can be used to create armies and complete city production projects (specifically useful for wonders). We quickly learned however that leaders can really dominate the game, so currently you're restricted in the number you can have."

Land and sea battle remain unchanged but air combat has been drastically altered. Morris describes them: "Of all combat, this has seen the greatest change. These units no longer move

around the map akin to a ground unit. Rather, they have operational ranges within which they can execute air missions. The primary bonus of this is that air units no longer function like super fast ground units."

Possibilities have been expanded and leadership choices are broader than ever.

There are four types of victory in Civilization III: Victory by space exploration, Total War (Conquest victory), Peace in Our Time (Diplomatic victory) and an Economic victory. Civilization III offers the chance to explore many different strategies than in previous incarnations. Construction of military or cultural items?

Firaxis has allowed the building of culture in cities to be as expansionist as crusading across Europe. Treaties or embargoes? Diplomatic preferences and national necessities will collide, as the possible avenues to world domination are so numerous.

Civilization has the hallmarks of another classic in the series. All aspects of the world are now intertwined: diplomacy, trade, culture, territory and production. Game mechanics are far more logical and information is presented with clarity and simplicity. We wait eagerly for the chance to rule the world once more.

Sound Game Design

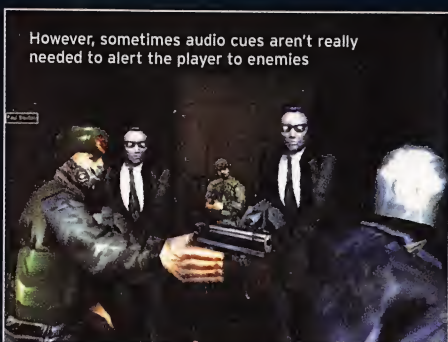
YOU CROUCH IN THE DARKNESS; HOPING NO ONE WILL FIND YOU. LISTENING HARD FOR ANY SOUND OF APPROACH, YOU HEAR FOOTSTEPS ECHOING IN THE CORRIDOR TO YOUR RIGHT. BACKING AWAY FROM THE SOUND SLOWLY, YOU HOPE YOU SEE AND SHOOT THEM BEFORE THEY SEE YOU. SUDDENLY GUN FIRE IS LOUD IN YOUR EARS, YOU DIE, THE DREADED "TERRORISTS WIN" POPS UP, AND YOU REALISE YOU WERE SHOT IN THE BACK. THE REASON? YOU HAVE YOUR HEADPHONES ON BACK TO FRONT.



BioWare's David Chan rates the use of sound in the Frontline Force mod for Half-Life



Ambient sound plays a leading role in telling the story of Gordon Freeman



However, sometimes audio cues aren't really needed to alert the player to enemies

Sound may not seem important until it goes wrong. Anyone trying to play a firstperson shooter without sound can tell you that. But how often do you actually take notice of the sound rather than just swearing at the annoying bits and ignoring the good stuff?

The sound of a game can be realistic or it can separate it from the crowd. If a good game has bad sound, it can ruin the gaming experience. If it's annoying, it can really ruin a gaming experience. (Think of the incessant beeps and bumbles emitted by Windows and console games).

David Chan is the Sound Engineer for BioWare and works directly in designing sound for games. He worked on MDK2 and the Baldur's Gate series, among others. He feels that his job allows him to create audio cues that are exciting and new yet feel connected to the environment.

Chan puts the unawareness of sound down to its subconscious nature, and says that the subtlety of sound means that it can be used to increase emotional response, and add to the other components of gameplay without becoming overpowering.

He feels that the sheer amount of time put into the sound in the Baldur's Gate series meant that the games

were a far more engaging and complete gaming experience. He estimates that the amount of dialogue recorded for Baldur's Gate II far outweighs that of most feature films. He also likes the sounds of MDK2, Tribes 2, Deus Ex, and Half-Life, and adds that the Frontline Force mod for Half-Life sounds are great.

While sound is integral to a games performance, Chan goes on to explain that it is often not seen as important.

"Unfortunately in our industry sound usually gets considered last," he says. "Most of the sound designers I know are working hard to combat this idea, but it's a prejudice that is carried over from film and television. Sound doesn't often make people say 'Wow!' but it reinforces the 'Wow!' factor and can help take it over the top."

This idea of sound as less important than everything else is a carry over from movies and television. When Chan was asked about the parallels between sound design in movies compared to that in games, he explained that while the goals were the same for both, the method and restrictions differed immensely.

Sound designers for games are restricted by a variety of things that don't affect the sound designers for movies and television. The restrictions of install sizes, system performance and memory limits all affect game sound, but the positioning and panning elements of sound are often handled by the soundcards, rather than the sound designers.

Sound designers for movies have a more complex job because they have to layer and mix the effects and the panning elements of the soundtrack, where the new breeds of soundcards will do that in-game.

However the sound designers for both mediums suffer the same problems convincing directors and game developers to take sound seriously. It is common

practice in the movie industry to leave sound design until the last minute, with budget cuts and time overruns cutting into the sound design process. While this practice is not as prevalent in the game industry, they have similar restrictions like disk space, and system requirements.

Chan thinks that those developers who do consider sound as a necessary evil will have it show in their work and therefore their profits: "Those developers that don't (consider sound important) will regret such a decision as poor quality sound can make a good game come across as weak."

All too often gamers don't realise how important sound is in their gaming habits. If a game doesn't have the expected depth of sound, we often can't identify what is wrong, just that something is, and this lowers our pleasure in the game.

Chan feels that gamers are demanding better sound, and buying better hardware, which pushes developers

inherent (Thief I and System Shock 2 for example). He feels that because the sound is a major part of gameplay, it becomes a basis for expansion of artistic boundaries, resulting in sound scapes that are evocative and a critical tactical element.

When asked about the importance of music and background sound in games, he says, "It depends on the game. Many games - driving games, for instance - lean pretty heavily on the music soundtrack, but for some other games, music is incidental, or gets in the way. A lot of players I know turn it off in RTSs, for example. Background sound is a big deal for most modern games; it really pulls you into the action."

He liked the soundscapes of Half-Life, Thief I & II, Deus Ex and System Shock 2.

Eric Brosius, who worked with LoPiccolo on Thief, also likes Half-Life, Thief and System Shock 2, among others. He felt that the sound design in Thief was good, not because

the subtlety of sound means that it can increase emotional response, and add to other components of gameplay without becoming overpowering

to have better sound. The practice of hooking your stereo up to the computer is probably an element of this. (We don't all just use it for blasting out mp3's do we?)

Greg LoPiccolo, who worked on Thief and other games at Looking Glass Studios, agrees with Chan. He also feels that the continuing efforts to give sound a better quality means that developers and players are now taking it more seriously than ever.

LoPiccolo feels that the artistic boundaries of sound are pushed in certain games where the sound scape is

he worked on it, but because the audio in Thief was an extremely important and intricate part of the game.

Not only were the audio cues designed for the player, but were also cues for the AI. Thief was one of the few games to actually calculate how the sounds made by the player (footsteps, dropping objects, etc) would affect the enemies. In most games, enemies are alerted when the player comes into visual contact or when the player enters a certain area, thus triggering the AI's response. In Thief, the latter doesn't apply; guards will only react when they actually see or hear the player.

Brosius thinks the key to effective sound design is to be able to implement sound as a whole, and to ensure balance between the effects, ambient sound, music and dialogue. "This 'working as a whole' is especially true for atmospheric and immersive games," he argues, "where you really want to create a coherent sonic landscape that draws you in to the world."

By integrating all the elements, Brosius creates a soundtrack that is as important for good gameplay as the graphics and the engine.

"I very much believe that the general vibe you get from a game, that intangible feeling you're left with, is



Counter-Strike's sound effects provide situational awareness to the player



In-House vs Contracted Sound Design

When asked about the practice of contracting sound design out to sound design companies, Bioware's David Chan is in favour of sound being in-house, but says he prefers to contract music out to other companies. "I prefer in-house design for sound and contracting for music. No matter how good a musician is it is unlikely that they can compose music in all the styles needed for games (orchestral, metal, techno, etc.)". Although he says that contractors need to have well-developed communication lines with the developers, something needed in order to create good sound whether in-house or contracted.

Valve Software's Chia Chin Lee also feels that communication is the key for good sound design, in-house or otherwise. "I believe excellence in any part of the game building process can only be achieved through regular communication and feedback between all individuals on a team, be it artists, designers, sound designers, or programmers. The off-site contractor has the disadvantage in this regard, although it is not always necessarily true."

Greg LoPiccolo believes that because those games that rely heavily on sound tend to have custom authoring and scripting tools, that it is more efficient to

have the sound designers and coders in-house. He adds that it's fine to have the simpler jobs done by contracted sound designers.

On the other hand, Eric Brosius thinks, "Using contractors has its advantages too: it's usually cheaper than hiring an in-house person and you can sometimes get more variety because the same person isn't doing the audio for all your games." But he still favours in-house sound design as it is a far more efficiently coherent way of doing sound.

In Thief, simulation rather than scripting means enemies dynamically react to the sound made by the player



more important than usually realised," he says. "And that makes audio - just like graphics and gameplay - integral to most any game."

Alex Waller, who teaches sound design at Griffith University, takes particular notice of the sound in games. He feels that the increase in technology (surround sound, Dolby 5.1, etc), and its availability to the average gamer, has resulted in sound becoming more important in game development.

Waller's favourite games for sound are Quake, Half-Life and Abe's Oddysee. Yes Quake is old, and Abe's Oddysee originated on PlayStation, but he says all three

games were innovative and original in their sound design.

Quake was one of the first games to take full advantage of the technology available, and specialised the sounds within an overall theme. Waller says he still listens to it. He also likes Half-Life because it too took advantage of new technology, which back then was the availability of 3D sound.

"Half-Life had a consistent quality and depth of sound, making sound a very important part of the game," Waller says. He also likes the way Half-Life moved away from the big bass sounds that



Tribes 2 uses sound as an effective medium of communication between teammates

characterised the Quake and Unreal series, to more reverberative, tinny mechanical sounds that were true to the environment, rather than simply appealing to most gamers' music taste.

Waller's reasons for liking Abe's Oddysee are a little more abstract. Apart from again making sound integral to the game, he says, "The sound was rich, varied and Giger-esque without the darkness". It had a European sound that made it more complex than most PlayStation (and some PC) games. It also required the player to listen to the game, and make sound connections (the ability to make Abe fart was also a plus for the kiddies).

When asked about sound in games, most gamers will list games where they liked the music, the weapon sounds or the voice acting. Few gamers will give

similarly reasoned answers to the sound designers. This happens when sound designers have done a good job, and the function of sound is that it enhances reality in an inherently unreal scene.

However the games listed by both parties will generally be the same (apart from Abe's Oddysee, perhaps) because the games where players say "Yeah, this voiceover/music/special effect is really good" are usually ones where sound designers will say similar things about the soundscape, background noise or footsteps.

This is because the job of a sound designer isn't just to make good effects or music, but to also create an environment that fully immerses a player, without being ostentatious.

Chan uses the example of an office to illustrate how important sound is, yet how it can be ignored.

"Imagine sitting in an office by yourself," he asks. "You might initially think it's totally silent, but after a while you will notice the subtle air flowing from the vents, the sound of footsteps outside the office, someone laughing down the hall, the quiet whirr of a computer. In day-to-day life your brain filters out these sounds, however if you place that office in a game and don't have these sounds the room somehow seems dead."

The technological aspect of sound has increased vastly since the seventies, and sound in games has benefited greatly from the increase in sound technology available to consumers. The advent of 3D sound capability meant that the sound in games has to become more

Oh, look, any excuse to put another screenshot of Counter-Strike in the mag



realistic and more flexible. Running past a humming generator sounds like you are running past a humming generator because the sound is linked to your movements.

However it isn't only firstperson shooter's that need

the true depth of a game.

Chia Chin Lee from Valve Software thinks that sound creates an illusion of reality in games, and is more capable of immersing the gamers than the other

to all those wanting to design sound for games... having programming skills will help no end, and being able to understand designers has to be a plus

good sound. In realtime strategy games, sound is often used as an early warning system (or just to annoy you into building homes for villagers). Or just for entertainment value. Who didn't click endlessly on peons in the Warcraft series to hear them get angry?

Sound plays an important role in all gaming experiences; by ignoring it, many gamers miss out on

elements of game design: "Audio is probably the best element for making the player feel like he or she is within the game environment. This is because visuals are confined on the monitor, whereas audio - with good speakers anyhow - is a physical phenomenon. The sound envelops you, and you *really* do exist within that sound space."

Lee also feels the differences between sound design in games and in movies is a result of the differing role of sound. He says that the sound in movies is designed to hold both visual and temporal aspects of the film together, whereas in games sound is used as an element of perspective separated from the visual and temporal.

While what Waller and Chan have said may make you think that sound design is a thankless job, where you're expected to do wonders, but simultaneously the work you do isn't important, both also say that sound design is a great job. Chan gets to use synths, programs like Pro-Tools, Sound-Forge and reference CDs to do his work. (Also bubble gum and duct tape...)

Waller teaches his students to use Pro-Tools, but not the bubble gum or duct tape. LoPiccolo says that he uses most PC sound software as it is flexible, reasonably

Future of Gaming Sound

So what is the future of game sound? David Chan thinks it will rely even more on technology to provide the in-game effects, while allowing sound designers to exploit those effects in even more creative and original ways, without compromising the reality and coherence of the game. The increasing availability of high-end speakers and soundcards to average gamers certainly points to technology playing a large part.

Chia Chin Lee hopes that the evolution of games will create a need for less literal sound, and more aesthetic creativity for the designers. He also sees the development of even better sound hardware as a

normal process to echo the rest of computer-related hardware.

Greg LoPiccolo also feels that the progress in sound design is dependent on technological advances, but adds that "once it's a snap to do highly-realistic realtime sound scapes, I personally hope that game sound designers will start to explore more impressionistic, evocative, surreal designs, and begin to push the limits of interactive sound in a way that is rarely attempted now." He adds that almost all development time is used getting the basics working on the platform, and there is little time left to work with the artistic side of sound.

In the short term, LoPiccolo feels that there will be more multi-speaker and surround sound support, more channels and more realism.

Eric Brosius suggests that, after being ignored for many years, sound hardware is finally becoming a focus for development. He too feels that the hardware will soon become responsible for the 3D effects and leave designers free to integrate more artistic effects, although he acknowledges that sound design still does not hold a high place in gaming hierarchy. He says that "a big step forward will be when audio is normally a part of core gameplay."



priced and it sounds good. Brosius also uses SoundForge and has his own small studio at home.

Chan has some formal training in audio, but got his pips working with bands. His suggestion to all those wanting to design sound for games is to not be afraid of the technology. Having some programming skills will help you no end, and being able to understand the rest of the designers and developers has to be a plus.

Lee lists a few more attributes of good sound designers. He feels that to be a good sound designer, "You need the ability to communicate your thoughts as well as extrapolate ideas from fragmented conveyances. An understanding of games outside the perspective of audio is crucial in order to take advantage of the complete medium. Knowing when to juggle between intricate details and broad strokes is also important." He

too thinks sound design is a terrific job.

LoPiccolo is self-taught, but says, "Some amount of experience in a studio setting is invaluable. Knowledge of MIDI, sampling, synthesis, digital audio recording, and film scoring are all very valuable."

Brosius was originally a musician, and began work in sound design as "an 'edit monkey' (an assistant who does the tedious grunt work that the real sound designer doesn't want to do) and just learned as I went." He also composes music for games, which he feels is a harder component of sound design, "especially when you're called upon to write in a multitude of musical styles. But music is so subjective that you never know who will be really good at it. If you can do something with a bit of originality, that really goes a long way."

But Chan, Lee and Waller say that a commitment to sound shows in a far superior end product. "Sound is a foundation element of good game making" says Chan. He feels that sound designing games allows him to push himself creatively, and work with cutting edge equipment, while creating original and exciting sound scapes for gamers.

The question is, will the status of sound design change? Will gamers come to fully appreciate the hard work and bubble gum that goes into good sound design in games? Or will publicity still be centred on graphics and engine capabilities rather than all the elements of good gameplay?

Lucy Baker

reviews



DAVID WILDGOOSE

In between thrashing the Hyper boys at office cricket (postpak tubes make great bats, by the way) and traipsing through the twisted world of Anachronox, I've resigned to spend more time tooling around with the Deus Ex SDK. The greatest ever singleplayer mod starts here!



JAMES COTTEE

What a dry month it's been. After thoroughly road-testing Emperor to determine exactly how boring it is, I had mostly been re-playing the original Commander Keen trilogy and Alley Cat. Then Anachronox came along, and my world-view was turned upside down. A fun game? In this day and age?



ANTHONY FORDHAM

I've just finished watching a webvideo of two Belgians reacting to Max Payne. Unfortunately, I can't print any of the descriptive words they used to express their pleasure at killing yet another hoodlum, which is a shame, because without those descriptive words, this anecdote isn't even very funny.



CHRISTIAN READ

I've spent the last few months locked in with nothing more than a bottle of tequila, a copy of Black & White, and my own sweat. Well, actually, I've finally gotten around to playing Deus Ex and living in an Age of Empires Gameguide hell.



JOHN DEWHURST

The joys of Max Payne and his "buka buka!" have swallowed every stray moment in the office. In my personal time, it's the impressive Arcanum and the physically destructive Space Tripper, which I'm trying to give up... it's doing horrors to my nervous system.



MICHAEL WU

It's often the odd weird little add-on that spices up your average ho-hum LAN party. And there's nothing more unconventional than custom made CS maps with drivable cars. Emulate drive-by shootings, run over pesky snipers, hi-jack trucks and stab SWAT look-alike taxi drivers. What more could you ask for?



TIMOTHY C. BEST

I am the Dark Core of Horror at the Centre of Something that's Really Horrible. I am the Ghost Who Limps, I am the Eggman, I am the Walrus. I'm also totally overwhelmed by the pure charm of Peter Molyneux. He's such a lovely old duffer...



NATHANEAL JEANNERET

With the looming release of Heroes of Might & Magic IV, I have been kicking it old skool with HOMM3, rediscovering sleep deprivation in a very big way. This game is pure gold I say! I will sleep as soon as I can find me a Dwarf's boots of prancing +10...



JACK KULYK

Though it was Michael who did the PowerTest, I never want to see another ISP in my life. I never want to hear the modem dialup sound. I never want to come home and find men drilling holes in the floor and I especially don't want another free AOL CD. They're just so 1998.



DANIEL STAINES

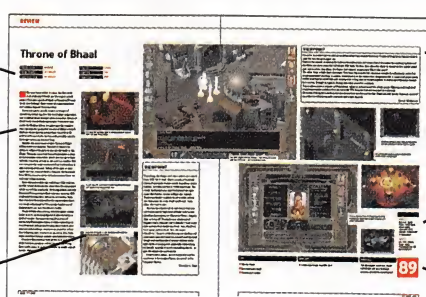
Despite being held by the police for questioning over several Tomb Raider related hate-crimes this month, I still was able to flee the country for several weeks and purchase every Squaresoft game ever made ever in the whole history of everything.

NEW REVIEW SYSTEM EXPLAINED

Here you'll find the essential information for purchasing the game, including the RRP and OFLC rating.

This is our objective take on the game, informing you exactly what the game is all about, its features and crucial gameplay mechanics.

Witty and informative, our captions will complement the screenshots perfectly, illustrating key aspects of the game.



This is our subjective take on the game. Each game is played and reviewed by at least two writers, providing a broad perspective of opinion on the game's quality.

Here is where you'll find out if the game will run on your PC. We tell you what you NEED to get the game running, and what you'll WANT to get the game running better.

The Pros and Cons of the gameplay, a quick summary of the Overall experience, and a percentage score to allow comparison with other similar titles.

games

The most authoritative reviews around

This month, allow me to herald the new PC PowerPlay review format. Divided into two convenient sections, we can now supply you with the impartial facts followed by our entirely opinionated appraisals. And what appraisals!

Now, at least two critical voices can be heard in the Viewpoints of PowerPlay experts. Slicker, leaner, more direct. Disagree with one opinion? There will surely be an entirely different perspective conveniently located in the same review. We welcome some new voices to the PowerPlay inner sanctum, we're sure you will be suitably impressed.

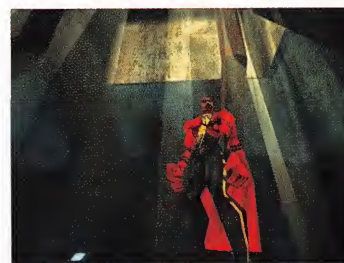
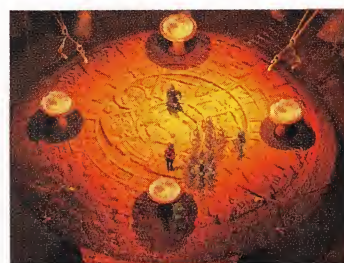
There is no Dutch-comedy-expletive commentary running over the top of Max Payne as in the 3D Realms gameplay movie-of-the-week (check out the web for that one!). Regardless, we were pleasantly surprised by a) the mix of grimy surrounds, b) ultra-violence and c) the glorification of both a & b. Yes, not bad at all. The dark and brooding figure of Max Payne is a good heir to the maniac retribution tradition made famous in films like Commando and Get Carter (Payback?). Games playing films, films playing games - does anyone remember Tomb Raider? On a less disappointing note, who didn't see Final Fantasy? Oh dear, thank the Lord for DVD.

Pool of Radiance was set for review this month, then it was cruelly snatched away. We saw it and were ready to deliver the word to you, good reader but this is a strange business. The long story short is that its release date has slipped, so the review has too. Hold tight, RPGers, it's coming.

Lastly, I'd like to send a fond farewell to our outgoing editor, David Wildgoose. Cheers for all those years of hard work and dedication. The more vocal readers will let you know themselves no doubt but on behalf of the PowerPlay massive, let me say: Good luck in the future - it's been wonderful.

Keep smiling

johnd@next.com.au



- 54 MAX PAYNE
- 58 EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON
- 60 ANACHRONOX
- 62 FLY! 2
- 64 BG2: THRONE OF BHAAL
- 66 SUDDEN STRIKE FOREVER
- 68 LEGENDS OF M&M
- 70 ORIGINAL WAR

THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

- 90+** Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
- 89-80** A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
- 79-60** Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
- 59-40** Decidedly average, probably boring.
- 39-0** A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

GAME OF THE MONTH COMPETITION



Microsoft wants you to play Throne of Bhaal the way it was meant to be played. As such, we have been supplied with one Intellimouse Optical to give away. Just answer this question for your chance to win!

IF YOU WORSHIP BHAAL, WHAT SORT OF PERSON ARE YOU?

Write your answer on the back of an envelope, addressed to:
Microsoft Game of the Month,
PC PowerPlay, 78 Renwick Street,
Redfern NSW 2016

Max Payne

DEVELOPER	REMEDY	PRICE	\$89.95
PUBLISHER	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE	RATING	MA15+
DISTRIBUTOR	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE	AVAILABLE	NOW

Well, Max is here at last, after some considerable delay. The first of the two 'when it's done' games produced by 3D Realms (the other is of course Duke Nukem Forever), Max Payne aims to bring something new to high-action big-gun PC shooting. With a story that is comfortably cliché, a violence-is-everything philosophy and a powerful and attractive 3D engine, Max Payne certainly has its sights set on being the next big thing in PC gaming.

Max Payne, the rather self-consciously metaphorical moniker of the protagonist, is a typically wronged New York Cop who has Lost Everything and is therefore out for Revenge. When his family is killed by junkies high on a new drug called Valkyr, Max joins the DEA, and three years later arrives at a deserted subway station, ostensibly to meet his good friend and colleague Alex. A short, firefight-heavy mission later, and Alex is dead, with Max in the frame for his murder.

So begins a particularly bloodthirsty rampage through the dark underbelly of New York (as the game would put it) with Max exacting his semi-automatic gas-propelled revenge on literally hundreds of low-lives, mercenaries, corporate killers and the occasional boss character. Max is one man against hordes of evil-doers, always outnumbered and frequently outgunned.

In order to assist the player, Max has the semi-magical ability to enter Bullet Time. Fans of the Matrix DVD will recall that Bullet Time was the production company's name for those moments in the film where the action froze and the camera panned around a character in mid-kick, or allowed Keanu to dodge bullets. It is this latter function of Bullet Time that is used - frequently - in Max Payne.

When entering a gunfight, the right mouse button is combined with a directional movement to execute a slow-motion dive for cover. So RMB + W equals a dive forward underneath oncoming bullets. While in Bullet Time, all movement and fire rates are dramatically slowed, but it is still possible to aim in real time. This allows Max to get the drop on large groups of enemies, and actually encourages the player to throw caution to the wind and go in with all guns blazing.

Max can also ShootDodge - another trademarked piece of jargon from Remedy - which allows him to combine the jump command with directional movement to dive and roll out of the way of hazards. Jump combined with left, right or reverse movement results in a roll in the corresponding direction, while a forward jump is just that, a forward jump.

However, the game is refreshingly light on jumping puzzles. The environments are quite varied within the

overall model of inner city New York. Max travels through the subway system, over rooftops, down by the docks, through warehouses (of course), deep into mysterious science facilities, through swanky mansions and up a corporate skyscraper. Texturing is very strong and highly detailed, although you will need a beefy machine to make the most of this. Even the tiny items such as coffee cups and toilet paper rolls have proper textures, and the sense of proper scale is especially effective.

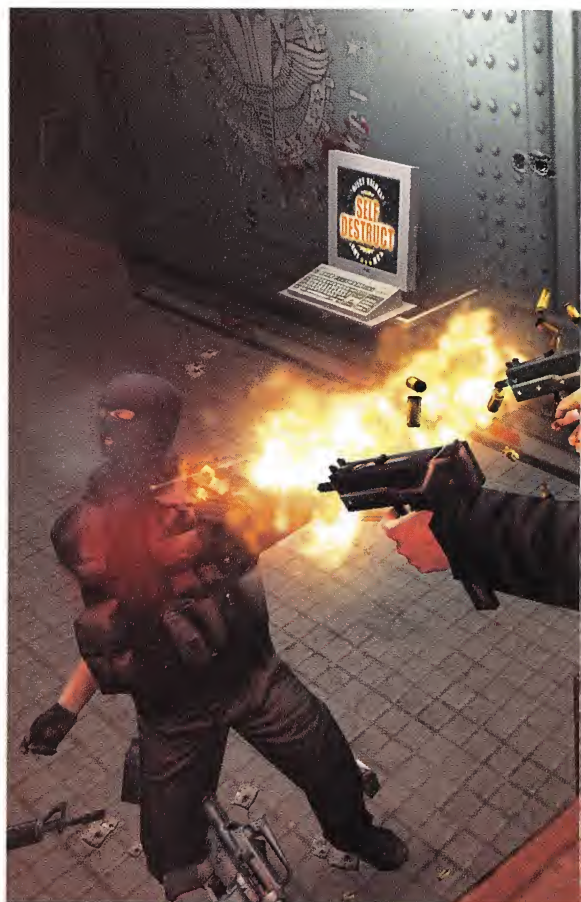
In a slightly old-fashioned move, the story is conveyed through the use of graphic-novel style cut scenes, complete with speech bubbles. Each frame of the comic is narrated by Max, and the voice-parts of the various characters are performed reasonably well by invisible actors. The images in each frame are posed photographs that have had a Photoshop effect applied to them to make them appear hand-painted.

Rather than having to sit through each narrated comic sequence, a set of CD-style controls appears at the bottom of the screen, allowing the player to either skip the whole sequence, or browse the comic book later on at their leisure, once the bloodlust has faded.

From this it is possible to see that Max Payne is clearly divided into narrative sequences and gameplay sequences, rather than integrating the two as in Half-Life. This is in keeping with the game's deliberate decision to affect a cinematic style. While in-game cutscenes are infrequent, they utilise traditional camera angles, reveals, snap-zooms and plenty of exciting angles. This lends a film-like quality to a game that is otherwise limited to still images in comic-book sequence.

Inside the gameplay sections the environments are, as mentioned, highly detailed but largely static. Most objects cannot be manipulated in any way, although some televisions can be switched on, and some even show soap operas or news broadcasts. Occasionally it is possible to interact with some objects - a drum kit backstage at a nightclub for instance can be used to play a half-bar break, while a nearby electric guitar strikes a discordant chord when stepped upon. Conversely though, most light switches cannot be operated, and many cardboard boxes are indestructible, even when beaten repeatedly with a crowbar or baseball bat.

The player's principle task then remains to travel through the various environments of Max Payne and blow away everything that moves. Max is a man without allies, and every human he encounters is worthy of one thing only; a bullet. ■



Bullet Time allows Max to get the drop on everyone from pistol-packing junkies to this flak-jacketed mercenary (above) armed with a Colt Commander machine gun. Bullet time encourages swift action and daring attacks.





VIEWPOINT

As the final score indicates, the game marked a rather disappointing end to a long wait. Sure, it's a great looking game, with well-designed environments and crisp textures. But what's the point of putting heaps of effort into a bunch of environments when they're all essentially sets of corridors full of crates?

The real shame of Max Payne is that there are actually a few moments where the story really kicks off and you find yourself drawn in - I'm speaking specifically of the two dream sequences that mark important turning points in the narrative. Artful use of the field of view and player-participatory storytelling lead you to question Max's motivations. Unfortunately, even the dream sequences fall flat as they quickly degenerate into running-through-the-maze-following-a-baby-crying melodrama.

Max Payne is a game that offers very little beyond running into a room and shooting everyone. The player has no tasks beyond killing, and you'll find yourself carried along by the narrative, which in turn rudely jerks the player from the game world into a graphic novel. In the end we're left with an unimaginative shooter whose few innovations have little ultimate effect on gameplay. A slow-mo mode and a graphic novel do not a gaming revolution make.

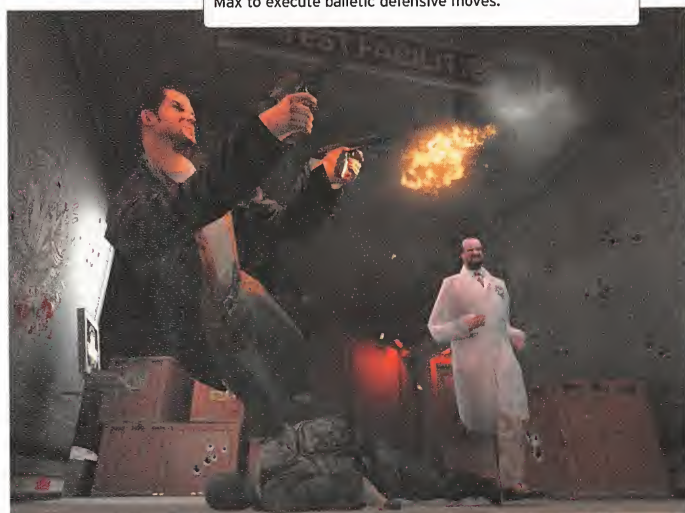
Anthony Fordham

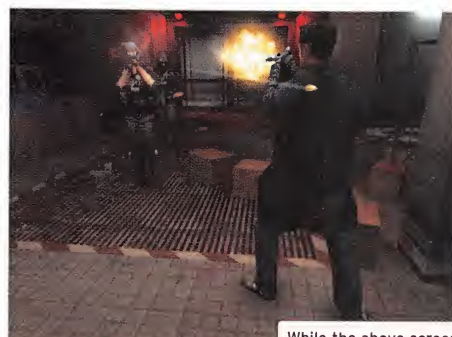


Max is given access to an explosive arsenal of real-world weapons. Favourites include dual Ingram sub-machine guns, and the redoubtable Colt Commander MG (below).



ShootDodging, shown in these three screenshots, allows Max to execute balletic defensive moves.





While the above screenshots show another massacre, Max is typically hopelessly outnumbered and often outgunned.



VIEWPOINT

Here's a game that is saved from the oblivion of mediocrity by one stroke of genius, cribbed wholly from *Th* F*ck*ng M*tr*x*. Bullet Time is no gimmick - of course it looks cool, but that's not what counts. Bullet Time is an incendiary addition to the shooter arsenal, one that fundamentally rewrites the existing rulebook.

Recent shooters have emphasised caution and stealth; Max Payne encourages the player to leap into situations where he's ludicrously outnumbered. You're not picking off thugs from a distance; you're always defying death in the midst of an exquisitely choreographed gunfight. The end result is a continuous series of the most thrilling, seat-of-the-pants shoot-outs since *Half-Life*.

Sadly, the high of Bullet Time only reveals the lows of the rest of the game. Remedy has undoubtedly built a capable engine, but wasted it on a forgettable, formulaic setting. While corridors have never been better textured, the lack of imagination and world interaction within the environments is unforgivable.

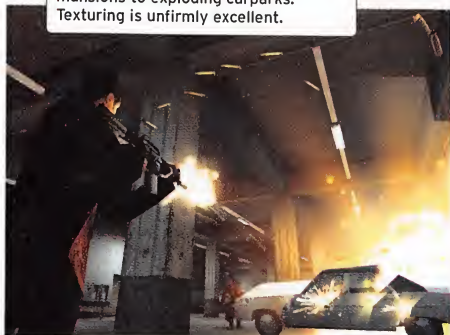
Despite the endearing melodrama of the narrative (again inspired by Woo), the stilted cut-scene storytelling - which neatly divides the game into discrete 'gameplay' and 'plot revelation' sections - cripples the pace and level of immersion. In this regard, the short length is a blessing. Just as you're getting bored, the credits roll...

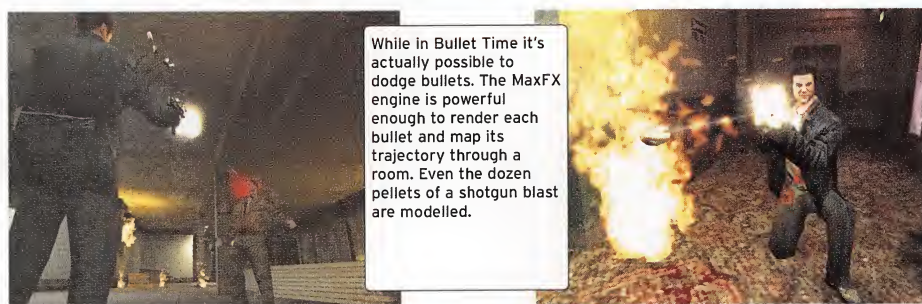
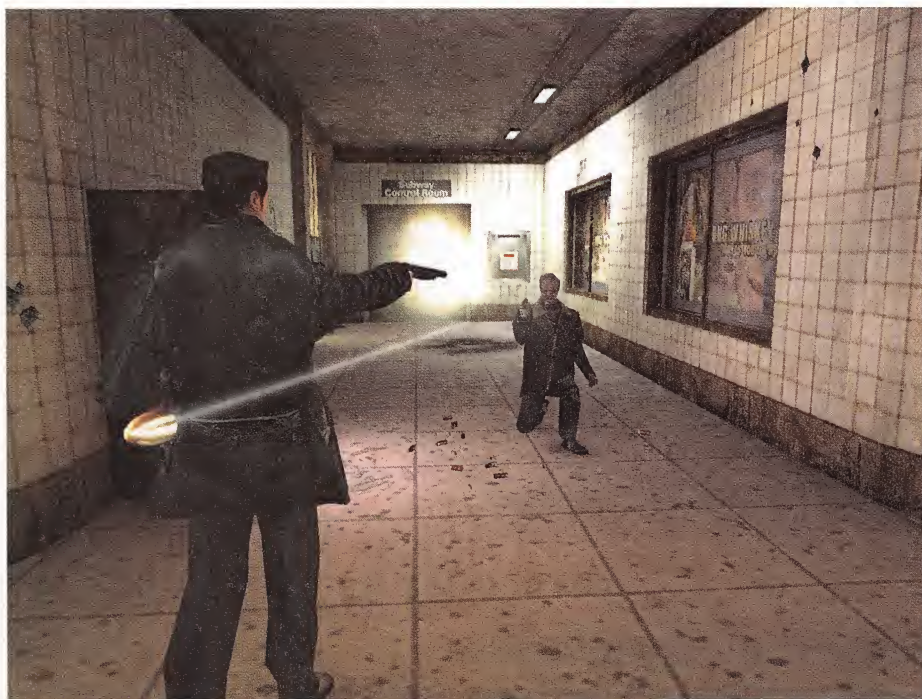
David Wildgoose

While every enemy is essentially the same - a man with a gun - the engine randomises models to combine heads with different bodies and clothes. The higher the detail level, the more variety in enemies. For those with low end PCs though, Max will have to fight an army of clones.



Environments range from swank mansions to exploding car parks. Texturing is unfirmly excellent.





While in Bullet Time it's actually possible to dodge bullets. The MaxFX engine is powerful enough to render each bullet and map its trajectory through a room. Even the dozen pellets of a shotgun blast are modelled.

VIEWPOINT

Monsieur Payne has all the obvious appendages: over-boiled voice-overs, scarred man vs. the world vendettas, self-serving one liners. It's a little too clichéd and nasty, what with all the hookers and syringes and heavily armed scumbuckets. Where's the redemption? Who's the good guy? What's my motivation? What the hell are the developers appearing in the cutscenes for?

Max Payne the man, would be more impressive if he didn't look constipated half the time? Shake your head for the dumb-ass expression.

The dull story aside, there's something about Max Payne that I really like. The third person aspect translates to a different, slower pace but the camera causes no problems even in the toughest battles - impressive. I think Max Payne would have benefited greatly from some grabs or combos, perhaps some pistol-whipping. For this reason, my money's still with Oni. However, this is a new benchmark for a good third person game. Is the hype justified? Yes.

Would I play it twice? This is where the game falls down, as there's not a great deal of replay value, unless beating the clock tickles your fancy. I have a feeling that Max Payne will be the next banner icon for extreme lobby groups in their crusade to ban games.

John Dewhurst

The MaxFX engine is also very effective at modelling flame and explosion. One memorable moment has Max running for safety through an exploding Italian restaurant.



NEED

Celeron 366,
GeForce2 MX,
128Mb RAM,
450Mb HDD

WANT

Athlon 1GHz,
GeForce2 Ultra,
192Mb RAM,
850Mb HDD

VIEWPOINT

It's difficult to fault Max Payne. It gives us an unreconstructed action experience, where the War on Drugs is something you (or at least Max) can take seriously. Max takes the moral high ground in the first five minutes, allowing us to sit back and bathe in blood.

The game engine hums along just fine, with incidental sound effects clueing one in at appropriate moments. Gameplay is highly linear, with key finding of some import, but the superior action sequences carry the product as a whole. It's a pleasant change to see crucial firefights given a measure of visual intensity, allowing one to swear in slow motion while invoking Bullet Time. Far from being a tacked-on gimmick, this actually improves control when you need it most.

As for dramatic impact, you can take it or leave it. There's something about Photoshop filters that suck the gravity out of any image, and the comic-book retellings of Max's life story had me laughing from start to finish.

This is perhaps the best thirdperson shooter on PC ever; it's certainly the best since Urban Chaos. If the new Duke Nukem isn't out by the time you read this, then go for your life.

I like this game. Regardless of what these other doomsayers claim about anti-immersive storylines and bad acting, I like it.

James Cottee



FOR

- Attractive environments
- Good characterisation
- Bullet Time

AGAINST

- Unimaginative environments
- Anti-immersive narrative method
- Little to do but run and shoot

OVERALL

Solid, polished shooter that has its occasional moments, but fails to live up to the hype

84

Eurofighter Typhoon

DEVELOPER	DID	PRICE	\$49.95
PUBLISHER	RAGE	RATING	G8+
DISTRIBUTOR	INTERPLAY	AVAILABLE	NOW

The Russian mafia has pooled their ill-gotten gains and set their sights on a massive attack on Europe. All that stands between them and all-out victory is Bjork, and a small force of ICEFOR ground and air units desperately protecting Iceland, a vital logistical conduit for US equipment and reinforcements. Bjork's spectacular death while single-handedly taking on the Russian submarine fleet with nothing more than the songs from her first two albums gave the boys just the sort of morale boost they needed, and the battle was joined in earnest.

Eurofighter Typhoon is an innovative attempt to place a flight simulator within a dynamic realtime war campaign where missions are created to suit the developing situation and where your success or failure directly impacts on the fortunes of your forces. You begin the game with eight pilots scattered throughout the airbases all over Iceland. Keeping these chaps alive is rather important as you don't get replacements. As a result, Typhoon is one of the few flying games around that actually requires you to bail out of your aircraft when necessary rather than just starting the mission again.

The Russians forces come in hard, fast and in great numbers. If you can keep sinking their landing craft their ground forces will be greatly weakened, but you can't stop them altogether as they eventually just spawn in a sector of your map in order to keep the game rolling along. Rather frustrating if you've been cleaning out the Russian watercraft like fish in a barrel.

You will come under fire from sub and air launched cruise missiles, fight off the latest Russian air hardware and even get to have a go at the Russian Navy. Once they land you'll also have to deal with a massive invasion of tanks and air defence vehicles, and that's when it gets hairy.

Now all this sounds great doesn't it? Sadly DID's execution of this project has been appalling to say the least. For example, anyone who enjoyed DID's earlier EF2000 simulation will probably break down in tears when they play this. Typhoon, you see, while technically being a flight sim, is more of an arcade game.

Huge compromises have been made by the designers in order to make the game more accessible to people who don't play flight sims. Huh? Say that again. Heck, don't ask us to explain the logic. Can you imagine a flight sim where your planes have no rudder control? Well now you don't have to because it's here! Hooray! ■



Intercepting CMs will keep your installations safe



NATO planners figure out the best position for Bjork's surprise wailing attack



VIEWPOINT

Worse than the silly flight model though are the numerous bugs. Your pilots are supposed to be able to handle missions on their own, and when it gets busy they have to.

But it seems that sometimes a new NATO air combat tactic comes into play. Your pilots will lull the Russians into a false sense of security by flying their planes in circles until they run out of fuel, and then crash. Brilliant! Europeans can sleep safely in their beds knowing that the best of the best of the best are dozing comfortably in their cockpits.

To rub salt into the wound that is Typhoon there is the waypoint system - marvellous it is. You are forced to pass through at least one waypoint on each mission. Unfortunately as your targets are very fast moving by the time you get to these waypoints they are long gone and usually kicking arse somewhere else on Iceland. Bloody marvellous.

Eurofighter Typhoon is an unplayable mess and one of the most obviously unfinished games released all year. The only way DID could make things worse is if they individually posted a bag of dogpoo to everyone who buys the game with a letter inside saying something like 'Eat this sucker'.

George Soropos



VIEWPOINT

This is not a game for serious flight simulator pilots. With the aircraft on full throttle, you can be doing four hundred knots before rotating with full weapons load. This isn't a problem though as the excessive speed has no effect on your undercarriage or aircraft performance. Forget about the flight model. There isn't one.

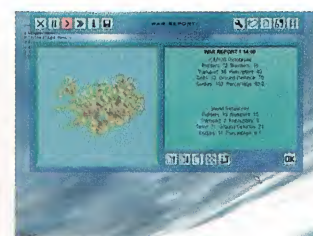
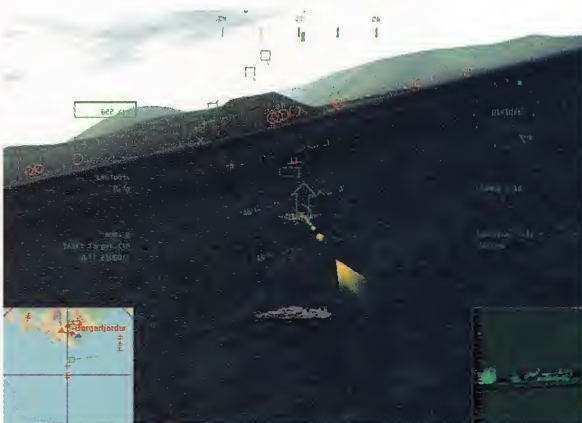
It's not a game for combat pilots either. There's no dogfighting, no formation flying, no need for strategy and no excitement. The greatest danger you're likely to face is the AI crashing one of your planes while your attention is elsewhere. All the challenge has been eliminated from this game and what's left is boring.

The graphics engine is good, but with the game set in Iceland there is not much variety in the terrain, just an awful lot of water. The small island location also eliminates the need for air-to-air refueling, so there's really no need to stay awake at all. The interactive video of pilots playing billiards and reading magazines is just the thing to get the head nodding too. This could well be the forerunner of a new genre - flight sims for insomniacs.

Effortlessly navigate yourself to dreamland!

Of course this assumes you can get the game to run at all. Don't worry if the bugs get you though, you're not missing anything.

Greg Ingram



There is an included waypoint system like in many flightsims, but there is no way of skipping or re-assigning waypoints, and often by the time you actually get to where your target is supposed to be, the target in question is several miles over the horizon...



Rather than controlling one plane, the player has command of several, but must rely on the sub-standard wingman AI to keep these other pilots alive



NEED
PII 400, 64Mb RAM, 8Mb Video, DirectX compatible sound
NEED
Athlon 1GHz, 192Mb RAM, GeForce2 GTS, 500Mb HDD, DirectX compatible sound, insomnia, insect fetish

FOR

- Innovative game design
- Nice looking game engine
- Use the box to stabilise wobbly tables in cafes

AGAINST

- More Bugs than the Chinese Embassy
- Rudderless flight model makes strafing a breeze... not
- Opium addicted pilots have tendency to nod off

OVERALL

An extremely poor showing from former flight sim masters DID. A crying shame, especially after the great Total Air War

55

Anachronox

DEVELOPER	ION STORM	PRICE	\$79.95
PUBLISHER	EIDOS	RATING	M15+
DISTRIBUTION	OZISOFT	AVAILABLE	NOW

Anachronox is a 3D RPG played from a thirdperson perspective. In a distant future setting, players control Sylvester "Sly" Boots, down-and-out private investigator. One starts out alone, in a seedy space bar in a dingy space station. As Sly gradually gets his act together, he gathers a party of up to six other characters, of which three can be active at any given time. One eventually travels to various exotic alien worlds, such as the planet Krapton, home of a race of super-heroes.

The game is implemented with a heavily modified version of the Quake 2 engine. Whilst not cutting edge technology alone, when combined with a phalanx of extra routines that allow for free camera movement, particle effects and so forth, it makes for a perfectly serviceable RPG experience. All the in-game characters look a little on the chunky side, but their lips move, and detailed textures do their best to compensate. The use of a FPS engine also allows for other commonly expected features, such as auto-save.

While at its simplest, an RPG can be merely a sequence of quests and equipment gathering strung together by an XP counter, designer Tom Hall has aimed for something a little different with Anachronox. By assembling a ridiculous cast of characters in an impossible setting, giving them all absurd costumes, bad attitudes and endless strings of one-liners, he's tried to create the definitive humorous RPG. To this end, the cast includes a burnt-out super-hero, a subservient toy robot, and saucy Eurasian assassin called Stiletto Anyway.

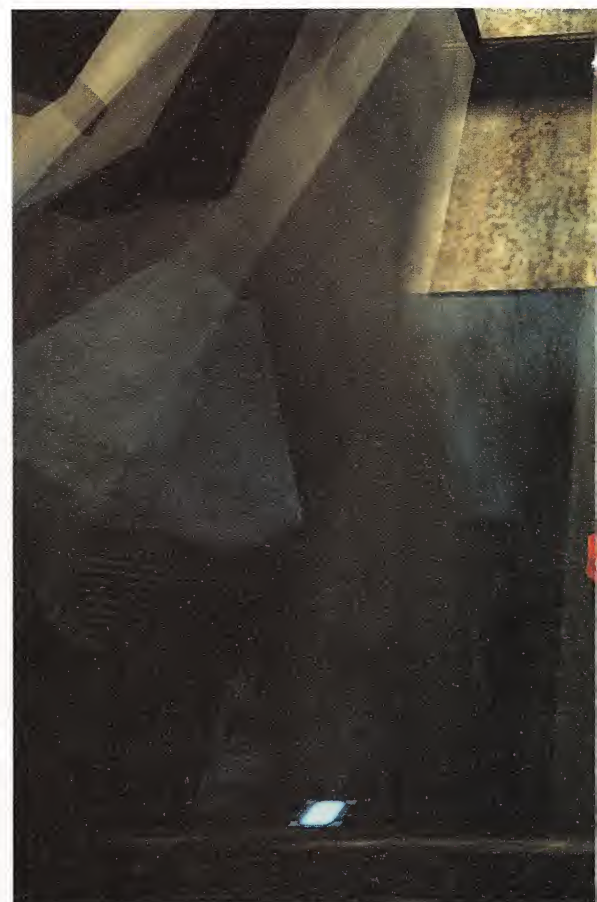
A page is taken from the book of console-based roleplaying, in that a magic system of scalable complexity is implemented. Coming into play about half-way through the game, and powered by exotic space rodents no less, it allows one to combine various artifacts to create different spell effects. The potential for experimentation here is enormous, and while not essential to complete the game, is there to help prolong the experience, or add to replay value.

The combat especially is highly reminiscent of the Final Fantasy series, but while the ports of Squaresoft's blockbusters to the PC have been unnecessary at best, Anachronox aims to take full advantage of the potential PC experience. There are over 100 levels, 90 different enemies, and scores of odds and ends hidden throughout. It doesn't set out to be a blockbuster, more a space adventure romp to make grizzled gamers feel young again. ■

This is the dingy squat where you start out. Look carefully, there are some crates in here



This is Stiletto Anyway. Double entendres follow her like a bad smell.



VIEWPOINT

To the best of my knowledge, Anachronox is the first RPG ever where an attractive holographic secretary lives inside your mouse pointer. In addition to imprisoning her in a miniature Tomorrow People office, it also keeps track of all your quests and whatnot, so you don't have to write anything down. This is an incredible technical and aesthetic achievement, but should come as no surprise to those who remember that Tom Hall is the creative genius behind Commander Keen.

While there are no wandering monsters and the banality they entail, Sly has to do a fair bit of wandering himself down long, winding corridors. Granted, this is a game pitched squarely at those wanting a long-term gaming experience, but a more succinct way of getting around the universe, perhaps using a map screen, might have come in handy.

Still, backtracking is kept to a bare minimum, and for once we get a decidedly Western take on a genre dominated by mis-translated hogwash. It's not a technical masterpiece, but it is a lot of fun to play. Let's be honest: with Civ 3 not out 'til Christmas, what have you got to lose?

James Cottee



Behold, the last son of Krapton

VIEWPOINT

With every release, Ion Storm games have improved, from the turgid *Dominion* to the mediocre *Daikatana* to the brilliant *Deus Ex*. Thus, discovering *Anachronox* (the studio's fourth title) is actually pretty good - very good even - shouldn't come as a surprise. But it does.

It shouldn't work at all: too many years in development; drawing upon the geriatric *Quake 2* engine for its technology base; inspired by Japanese RPGs such as *Chronotrigger*; the brainchild of noted developer fruit Tom Hall. But hang on, let's look at that list again.

This is the game that Tom Hall always wanted to make. If it took him four years to finish to his satisfaction, that's fine by me. If it uses an ageing engine because that's what was available when the project started, and Hall was too focused on perfecting the game design to even worry about switching to something more cutting edge, that's even better. If it steals wholesale from Squaresoft's finest hour (and clearly Hall's most treasured gaming experience), and then succeeds in improving it, that's worthy of nothing but praise.

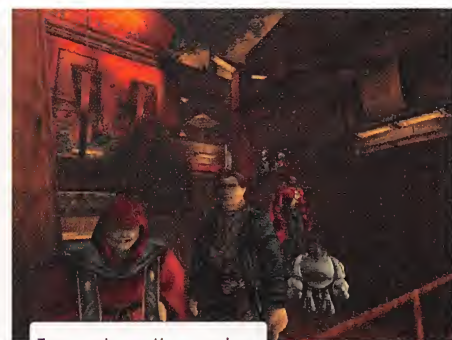
For Hall, *Anachronox* was a labour of love, and it shows in the wildly imaginative and effortlessly playable experience it delivers. This is Ion Storm's final release. What a great way to say goodbye.

David Wildgoose



Magical combat is accompanied by trippy visuals.

How can you lose with a store-front like this?



Everyone's mouths move in a disturbing manner.

Shake yo' booty!

Little animated segues pepper the game



NEED
PII-266, 64MB
RAM, 8MB
Videocard (Open
GL), 200MB HDD

WANT
PIII-500, 128MB
RAM, 16MB
Videocard (Open
GL), 1GB HDD

FOR

- Well scripted adventure with rather funny dialogue
- Arcane magic system to keep the trainspotters happy
- Use of older engine minimises required system specs

AGAINST

- Antiquated graphics give game a dated look and feel
- Camera control functional but labour-intensive
- Lots of running down dank, featureless corridors

OVERALL

Less than perfect, but an irreverent and enjoyable quest regardless

85

Fly! II

DEVELOPER	TERMINAL REALITY	PRICE	TBA
PUBLISHER	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE	RATING	TBA
DISTRIBUTION	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE	AVAILABLE	NOW

Approach Fly! II as an expansion rather than a new game and you won't be far off the mark. While two new aircraft have been added - the Pilatus PC-12, a luxury high performance aircraft with a turbo prop engine, and the Bell 407 Helicopter - the original six aircraft from Fly! are still present albeit thinly disguised with fictitious names and aircraft manufacturers labels removed from the cockpit panels and screens. You will find there are small differences in the external views for some of these aircraft but the performance statistics and cockpit panels remain the same.

Lighting, weather and terrain effects have been changed with the use of a new graphics engine. There are now three layers of cloud cover and a facility to generate random wind shears! And as before the game allows for the input of metar files to set weather conditions for your flights. Maximum visibility has been increased from twenty miles to sixty miles.

Complementing this better view is the improvement in terrain. Increased pixel resolution means the rendition of terrain is more detailed than in Fly! Once again five cities have been featured in particular detail. San Francisco and New York reappear but with a face-lift; Washington DC, Paris and Frankfurt have been added.

New to Fly! II is an adventure system incorporating eight pilot missions. Beyond those eight, the adventure scripting module allows the programmatically-inclined to create missions of their own. This module also allows for the future appearance of third-party adventures. The information supplied in the manual suggests some truly challenging possibilities.

Also new is the multiplayer facility which allows you to connect to a server and fly with other pilots. Only the latest version will work so check the web site if you have problems.

The manual included in the game is a short 32 page booklet that gives you enough information to get the pilot up and flying. The full manual is available on the CD.

Be aware that there are two versions of Fly! 2 available in Australia, the US and the European versions. This is one case where you definitely want to buy the European version as the US version is incomplete and does not contain all the features listed in this review. There are many patches and enhancements available to this product from Terminal Reality's web site (fly.godgames.com). ■



VIEWPOINT

Having paid the price of a new game, you have to wonder if Fly! II delivers good value. The two new aircraft are well-chosen, the helicopter flight module is excellent and the Pilatus is a joy to fly though the lack of performance specifications and power settings make learning difficult.

There is a noticeable gap however in the absence of any large aircraft. Third party suppliers will soon fill this gap (Precision Manuals is producing a Boeing 777) but that will come with another price tag.

The scenery graphics of Fly! II are a mixed bag. After the luminosity of Fly!, the skies here tend towards dirty, dull, and hazy. The cloud effects are noticeably poorer and the scattered low-level cloud looks frankly, silly. Terrain detail, a point of complaint with Fly!, has improved but only from an altitude above 3000ft. Below this and ground textures tend to wash out. The weather, rain and snow effects are well done and also have an impact on aircraft performance.

The full manual is good but has the drawback of not being supplied in printed format. Consulting the manual in mid-flight presents a real challenge. Overall, some nice features but of limited value if you already own Fly!

Greg Ingram



VIEWPOINT

First impressions are not good. A heap of cut corners betray a premature release. The most obvious of these shortcuts is the lack of a complete printed manual. The fact that the game ships in a DVD case - another cost cutting measure - would have made it impossible to include a proper manual anyway, but the real rub is the cost of printing out the massive digital version. Depending on your printer, if you even have one, it could set you back as much as a whole ink cartridge to get a manual to hold in your hand, doubling the cost of the game!

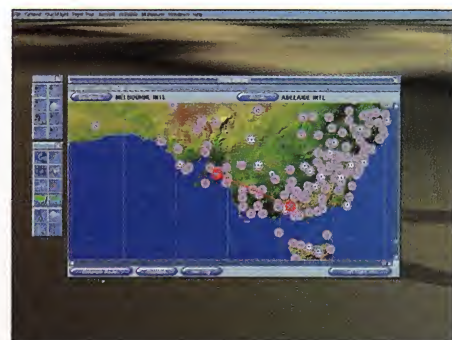
There are some good things about Fly II, the quality of the instrumentation in the aircraft cockpits is second to none and the weather effects are very good as well. It's also fun to be able to try landings with an engine out or your landing gear jammed. Most flight sims automatically crash your aircraft if you try touching down with anything mechanically out of shape.

Fly II is an okay product for advanced players who don't need a manual so much and who will appreciate the quality of the instrumentation. The latest Microsoft Flight Simulator is a better option however.

George Soropos



Weather effects and detailed and appear very effective. They also have a real effect on plane control. Thunderstorms, gales, unexpected showers of frogs are all included and accurately modelled. Well... maybe not the frogs.



Planning a flight from Melbourne to Adelaide. Outside the US the 'Generate Route' button doesn't work.



NEED
P2 133, 64Mb RAM, 1.3Gb HDD, 16Mb TNT2
WANT
Athlon 1GHz, 192Mb RAM, 3.5Gb HDD, GeForce2 MX, patience, intimate knowledge of the world's great airports, cap with airline logo on it

FOR

- The helicopter adds a new dimension to Fly!
- Flight models of all aircraft are excellent.
- The detail of the cockpits is still best of any flight simulator

AGAINST

- Scenery is improving but still needs work.
- There are no heavy transport aircraft in the simulation.
- The lack of a detailed printed manual.

OVERALL

A worthy successor to the original Fly! but several cut corners keep this baby somewhat grounded

71

Throne of Bhaal

DEVELOPER	BIOWARE	PRICE	\$39.95
PUBLISHER	INTERPLAY	RATING	M15+
DISTRIBUTION	INTERPLAY	AVAILABLE	NOW

Do you have what it takes be the next God of Murder? Would you like to gain untold power? Summon angels of death or Elemental Princes to do your bidding? Battle forces of monumental evil and create a legend? Enquire within.

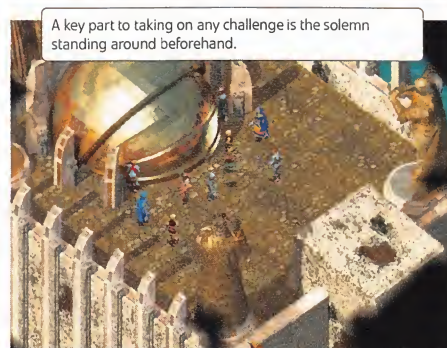
Expansion packs usually conjure an image of something tacked together like that Biology assignment you scribbled down the night after it was due. Throne of Bhaal is not one of those expansions. It comes in two parts: the Watcher's Keep dungeon and the chapters that continue the game after the end of Baldur's Gate II. BioWare claims that the game offers about 40 to 50 additional hours of play but fans will probably spend a lot longer savouring the final fling.

Besides the extra hours of story Throne of Bhaal offers some new features. The chief of these is the ability to teleport the party to your pocket realm in the Abyss. This gives you a true base of operations, a place to rest between encounters, which you can go to from virtually anywhere as long as you aren't in combat. You can reappear the exact point you left so backtracking to rest is a thing of the past. Talking of the past, in your realm you can summon back a choice of 16 characters from BGII to join your party and you can even team up with your oldest nemesis...

Since this game takes you well above 20th level (up to 40th in fact) there are also more than 20 new powers which run off the usual scale, like being able to summon Elemental Princes or transform into one, ignoring 40% of physical damage for a turn or so, or creating traps that stop time for everyone but the rogue letting them run amok unhindered for 10 seconds. Careful use of these powers can turn the tide of a battle.

These abilities are just icing, what the game comes down to is the continuing legend of your character, a child of murder. Your quest to stop the armies of marauding Bhaalspawn (many of them marauding in your direction) will see you hunting down five of your most powerful siblings, creatures so powerful, in fact, that defeating each requires epic quests as they have made sure that front-on assaults are doomed to failure.

Throne of Bhaal comes with all the style and design of the first two games as well as more of everything (foes, spells, areas to explore, artefacts to wield) and, of course, the big finish. ■



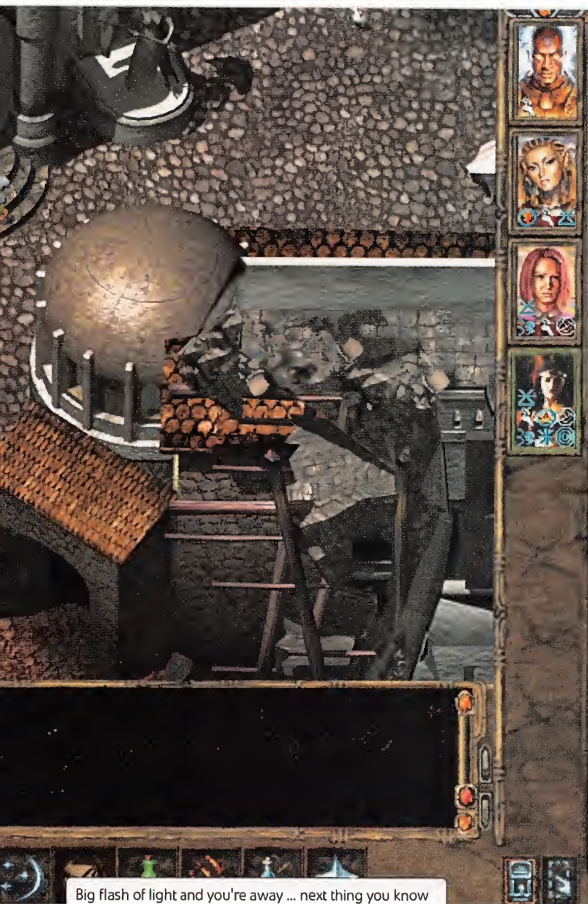
VIEWPOINT

If anything, the design and story take it up a notch from BGII. You'd think after a couple of hundred hours of gameplay things would be getting pretty familiar, and they are but in the best of ways. You rarely feel lost but you also find almost straight away that familiar tactics will get you toasted. Tactical gameplay is pretty much a must, unless you love going for raise dead spells and, more often, the load button.

Not having to backtrack to rest means that you can throw around high-level abilities with joyous abandon. Summoning an Elemental Prince, Angelic Solar or firing off 10 attacks in a whirlwind of biggest-mo-fo-weapon-ever is literally a buzz every time and one that makes you think, "you shouldn't have given me time to do that, oh no you shouldn't...". Keep in mind that you are dealing with immensely powerful enemies yourself and the level design and combination of enemy abilities make each battle surprising and potentially devastating (in literally seconds) if you do something dumb - or give the mages too much space.

Great balance, design, epic in tone and a worthy conclusion to hundreds of hours immersed in the Forgotten Realms.

Timothy C. Best



Big flash of light and you're away ... next thing you know you're in the Abyss ... ah home sweet home.

VIEWPOINT

It's unfair to expect from an add-on anything other than more of the same. Throne of Bhaal does that and does it well. But two things bugged me.

Bioware has sought to restore the balance between melee and magic-based characters by enabling fighters and the like to use some powerful 3rd Edition D&D feats. Yet then they allow the player to retreat to this 'pocket plane' and rest at whim, thus tilting the favour back toward magic-users. What's the point?

The other thing is high-level characters. They have the potential for situations outside the roleplaying norm, but developers seem unwilling to explore these aspects. In the hands of an imaginative DM in a pen-and-paper game, a 40th level fighter would be a god among men, ruling over an entire kingdom. In the hands of Bioware, though, he's wading through dungeons slaying ever-more powerful monsters.

This is not so much a criticism of Bhaal alone, rather an indictment of the whole genre. Allowing such high-level characters creates problems that no computer RPG designer has yet managed to overcome.

Of course, if dungeon-crawling and epic encounters is what you're after, Bhaal can only satisfy. However, some of us prefer our roleplaying with more role and a little less roll.

David Wildgoose



When stone heads with flaming eyes speak you should listen. Time for destiny I guess.

Lot's of statues mean a Gorgon or attacks by cranky, dead, stone people.



Here's a familiar face. You'll soon get used to his mocking laugh and wonder how you got along without him.



NEED

PII 233, 32Mb RAM, 1.2Gb hard drive space (includes BG2 install), 4Mb Direct X Videocard

WANT

PII 400, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb Videocard (for 3D acceleration)

FOR

- Worthy finale
- New features a buzz
- Strong level design

AGAINST

- Little more linear than BG 1 & 2

OVERALL

The spectacular conclusion. Shake the Realms and kick enormous amounts of tyrannical godling butt.

89

Sudden Strike Forever

DEVELOPER	CDV	PRICE	\$65.95
PUBLISHER	CDV	RATING	G8+
DISTRIBUTION	GV SOFTWARE	AVAILABLE	NOW

Due to Sudden Strike's much earlier release in Europe this expansion pack seems to have leapt out of the blue very quickly indeed. But we're not complaining. Sudden Strike is the most intense and truly challenging RTS to come along in years and the Forever expansion takes it to even greater extremes with more than 30 new units, twelve new missions, seven new singleplayer battles and 20 new multiplayer missions with all new game types.

There are also three difficulty settings that affect the original missions as well as the new. Vehicles can now drive backwards allowing them to withdraw without exposing their delicate behinds. Generals have some very handy binoculars which will increase your viewing range when used and officers now give a temporary experience boost to the troops in their influence.

There are some new heavy artillery and mortar units to play with, medic personnel, portable mortars which can deliver a very nasty surprise to you or the enemy, and Light Howitzers that have the advantage of being able to use direct fire. Because of the new artillery units in SSF combined operations and coordination are needed to succeed more than ever. Scouts and sweepers are essential for attack and defence and careful use of waypoints is required to keep them alive.

Best of all however is the fact that the expansion includes the excellent Sudden Strike editor, which allows you to make your own single and multiplayer missions as well as campaigns.

Many have compared Sudden Strike to the Close Combat series in terms of quality and we won't argue with that. However Sudden Strike is not a squad level game and therefore doesn't have the same intense authenticity that Close Combat imparts to its soldiers. The Forever expansion gives the player even more responsibility and a broader feeling of command. With so many units to control the temptation to use them inefficiently is always there, but if you do the price will become obvious very quickly.

The new maps offer a bigger challenge to the player because they teem with bunkers, pillboxes, towns and hills, all of which add to the treacherous nature of the environment.

Sudden Strike sorts the strategy experts from the tank rushers. It's a tough mental challenge that rewards the player with a real sense of achievement when victory is finally won.



VIEWPOINT

The original Sudden Strike was not for the faint-hearted and offered not only a new and innovative form of strategy gaming but a very difficult challenge as well. To succeed in this game required not only tactical skill but also a very good knowledge of the mechanics of the game and the ability to use resources wisely.

For example making the simple mistake of not assigning any officers to tank or artillery units will give your enemy a massive range advantage allowing him to cut your forces apart before you can even see him.

The new difficulty settings don't change much in this regard and even on the Easy setting Sudden Strike Forever will be tougher than every mission you've ever played in Starcraft, AOE II, RA2 or TA put together!

One thing that really would have been nice is a more sympathetic positioning of units at the start of missions. The only thing that really annoys about this game is having to spend so much time at the start of each mission getting your units into a sensible formation, and or cover.

Well, that and the fact that infantry mortars really shouldn't be able to damage armoured vehicles so easily.

George Soropos



VIEWPOINT

This is a very solid expansion pack for a very solid game. Thanks to generations of careful eugenic planning the noble German race have an innate knack for designing deep strategy games, along with the patience required to enjoy them. As an alternative to the flim-flammery you get from Westwood, we should all thank our lucky stars for the Krauts (*The borderline racist views of J Cottee are not necessarily the borderline racist views of PCPP - Ed*).

Sudden Strike: Forever implements a few rule tweaks, and several new units. The new campaigns are all well and good, but the new maps and the editor point this release squarely at the multi-player market. The overall complexity is roughly doubled, which is a good thing. The tech-demo look and feel carries across, too. It's still set only in the European theatre, though: for Australia vs Japan you'll have to boot up Steel Panthers.

The only question of worth with this package is a political one. When a mission pack comes out so soon after the game's original release, one can't help but wonder if the publisher is being... exploitative. You know, playing us all for chumps. Those who enjoy Sudden Strike will certainly get their money's worth from this add-on. Just be aware you're paying for the same game twice.

James Cottee



Initial unit deployment always seems a trifle illogical or, dare we say, mad, so considerable amounts of time are needed at the beginning of each mission to carefully re-arrange your troops into the sort of formation that won't get chopped to bits in the first thirty seconds



This expansion pack also includes the excellent Sudden Strike editor. Massively complex and hugely powerful, it should keep you going... forever



NEED
P233, 32Mb RAM, 4X CD, Win 95/98/Me/2000/NT, DX compatible sound, 150Mb HD

WANT
Duron 800, 64Mb RAM, 16X CD, DX compatible sound, 150Mb HDD, helmet with a spike on the top

FOR

- Heaps of new units
- Some nice refinements to gameplay
- Map Editor

AGAINST

- Difficulty levels aren't effective enough
- Still have to spend ages setting up at start of missions
- No V2 Rockets

OVERALL

Adds even more to the definitive World War II RTS. A must for all Sudden Strike owners

88

Legends of Might & Magic

DEVELOPER	NEW WORLD COMPUTING	PRICE	\$79.95
PUBLISHER	3DO	RATING	M15+
DISTRIBUTOR	TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE	AVAILABLE	NOW

An unsurprising firstperson iteration of a seemingly unkillable franchise, Legends of Might & Magic (LoMM) is essentially the meeting, greeting and subsequent copulation of Counter-Strike and goblins. The developer's main goal, as is stated rather blatantly on the box, is for this title to be considered 'the Counter-Strike for the fantasy generation' and this desire has manifested itself in a game-mechanic virtually identical to Valve's masterpiece.

LoMM is multiplayer only, either through the included GameSpy client or via a LAN. Each match starts with players being given the opportunity to choose what side they'd like to play on - evil or good - and what sub-class they'd like to play as within those broad moral denominations. These sub-classes can basically be divided into the 'warrior' and 'wizard' categories and have very little effect on how one goes about actually playing the game.

With that done, it is then necessary for players to purchase weapons, armour and powerups according to their preference and money supply. Just like Counter-Strike, money is awarded each round to both the losing and winning sides for the purchase of more goodies come next round. Weapons are divided into two categories - 'might' and 'magic' - and essentially offer a choice between standard melee bashers and long distance projectile arms. There is very little difference between each of the separate arms within each category.

It should be noted that, before all this occurs, the host of the game must first choose a map upon which the slaughter will occur. Every map - like Counter-Strike - is home to a specific game style, of which there are four in total. Each of these - Sword in the Stone, Princess Rescue, Warlord Escape and Slay the Dragon - are essentially fantasy variations of tried and true multiplayer team mods and offer very little in the way of originality. New World Computing has attempted to make up for this by peppering each map with a plethora of standard fantasy AI 'monsters' that will attack anything and everything on sight and can, thankfully, be turned off if one so desires it.

However, gameplay is only one end of the goblin tinted spectrum - so what does LoMM offer technically? Well, given that the game runs on the Lithtech engine, one would expect that everything look reasonably snazzy and it does. Decent framerates can be found on reasonably modest machines - say about a 500 with a TNT - and, despite odd moments of colour glitching, it is very hard to fault LoMM from a technical standpoint. ■



VIEWPOINT

The monetary cost of getting the fullest enjoyment possible out of this 'game' is approximately 1070 dollars. That's 70 dollars for the game and a thousand dollars for the ticket to the US you'll be needing in order to play it with a ping of less than 500. See, LoMM is multiplayer only and New World Computing - that's right, *the* New World Computing - has seen fit not to bother with the whole tedious process of programming bots for people who don't enjoy playing pingtastic picture slides on the exclusively US based game servers. Instead, they did bother to program AI for the stupidly aggravating computer controlled monsters that litter each and every map like so much ridiculous debris. I'm not entirely sure how games are developed, but I'm pretty damn certain that, somewhere in the process of the development there should have been a stage where someone in a Pepsi-stained Magic: The Gathering shirt said something to tune of: 'These monsters? These stupid, annoying, worthless monsters? No, you stupid idiots, no.'

Actually, come to think of it, that's pretty applicable to LoMM as an entire game. It's Counter-Strike with goblins and is quite possibly the worst FPS ever. Probably not worth your while.

Daniel Staines



VIEWPOINT

It's clear that someone at 3DO has decided Counterstrike is too valuable a property to leave to amateurs, and has attempted to take the King of Multiplay and mash it into a fantasy setting. Legends of Might and Magic is simply horrible. It's ugly, it plays slothfully, all the weapons seem to do the same amount of damage, the interface is confusing, the monsters are pointless and irritating, the different play modes add little, and you will constantly find your server invaded by noisy yanks from Kentucky demanding that they ownz j00 even though your ping is 45, there's is 500 and the running scoreboard is something like 63 to 1. And that was when you accidentally shot an arrow into a wall and, naturally, got killed by the splash damage. Perhaps with larger teams LoMM might be more fun, but I strongly doubt it. Four PCPP players plus an oscillating cloud of five or so Americans saw the maps quite crowded, and the design of the levels prevented any natural teamplay flow or direction. Also, you spend half your time fighting the incidental monsters, which respawn every time you finish a round. One-on-one play in LoMM is completely pointless. Every time you score a kill the map restarts, so it's usually impossible to achieve any mission objectives. This game has been poorly thought out, poorly executed, even poorly drawn. If you find yourself trawling the lonely LoMM servers at 3am on a Saturday, don't expect to find me there. I'll be off with the real gamers, playing Counterstrike.

Anthony Fordham



Each class has access to exactly the same weapons and can use the weapons equally effectively. There is one superweapon specific to each class, but since it costs 10000 gold it's unlikely anyone is going to bother playing a match long enough to save up enough cash to afford it.



You will grow to hate these lizard men. Equipped with auto-aim and a high-speed ball of what appears to be plegm, they really take the steam out of any victory.



NEED

Celeron 366,
64Mb RAM, TNT2,
56k dialup

WANT

Duron 800, 128Mb
RAM, GeForce2
MX, cable internet,
an appreciation for
bad art, no life,
and a strong
distaste for
Counterstrike

FOR

- Um ... it's looks pretty.
- There's ... uh ... goblins ...
- And a dragon!

AGAINST

- It's a shameless rip-off ...
- ... with goblins.
- Slow paced, absurd, annoying gameplay.

OVERALL

Poorly executed attempt to cash
in on Counterstrike by turning
terrorists into trolls. Avoid.

40

Original War

DEVELOPER	ALTAR	PRICE	\$79.95
PUBLISHER	VIRGIN	RATING	M15+
DISTRIBUTION	OZISOFT	AVAILABLE	NOW

This war for the future, fought in the past, looks like a 2D isometric RTS. It plays in a similar vein to Kingdom Under Fire, placing the onus on roleplaying and far greater strategic elements using small numbers of troops. The player shouldn't expect to use more than twenty individuals at any time.

Remember X-Com? Think of a realtime version using that intimacy of scale with far better handling and you have an idea what's going on. This is realtime strategy writ small, with an emphasis on tightly planned missions and excellence of execution over mass war. A lot of the usual RTS tropes such as building and research are here, but operate on a more intimate scale. To create, for example, an ammo dump, your best mechanic should be specifically tapped and guarded while he works.

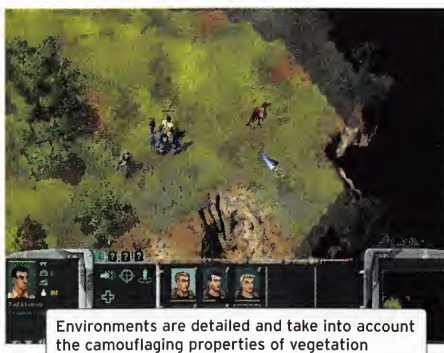
Missions are usually defined by one specific character, with the situation viewed from their perspective. Usually you'll have MacMillan as your major point-of-view character. He's a tough as nails, stereotyped grunt. The main Russian character is equally risible, speaking in broken English and using phrases such as "capitalist demon."

Each character gains experience in a variety of skills and as they can't be created during missions, these elite units become very valuable indeed. The small squads and persistent characters mean you'll grow attached to them over time, making an emotional connection absent in most RTS titles.

Many of the missions are difficult and highly puzzle oriented, but many of them fall apart once heavy machinery is involved. Many of the missions involve lightning raids or field espionage. Once you get tanks, mechanics become the only viable troop type; tactics soon give way to sheer grunt. Little emphasis is placed on upgrade of weaponry and there are only four or five unit types open to players. Once this level cap is reached, game balance quickly disappears leaving only a rush for hardware.

You'll find the game plays very slowly and when a lot of sneaking is involved, crawling around in grass and such so the game loses momentum and become almost repetitive. It also kills a level of decision making the game otherwise encourages. AI is very weak with troops responding in strange ways to stimuli and enemies rarely posing a serious challenge. Some of the animations - specifically explosions - also leave the player unmoved, as does a limited use of terrain tiles.

Original War will appeal to the military minded, objective oriented player over those who favour texture, twitch and frame. ■



Environments are detailed and take into account the camouflaging properties of vegetation



With the personalisation of each unit, battles are a much more intimate and tense affair



VIEWPOINT

Every problem this game could have just been fixed by letting your troops run. I mean, the little seppo bastards can crawl, why the hell can't they run?

Alright. I'm back.

Original War should be a great game. It has elements within it that make you think of a special effects film extravaganza. You know the kind of film I'm talking about. Dotted with elements of greatness but fundamentally flawed. "Oh, the bit where you had to train all the troops was great" and "the bit where you had to get into that tank was clever" followed by "but the bit where the combat didn't really work and the 'grass engine' freaked me out wasn't so hot."

Indeed, most of the gameplay is quite interesting, in its own way innovative and most importantly it's just different enough to make even someone who sees as many games as me take notice. But, damn, Original War screams out to me that it could have used another two months in crunch time because it seems oddly unfinished.

Special mention must go to the voice acting. It is amongst the worst captured on screen. From all the characters. The actual script is appalling as well, but you do get swearing, so that's something.

Christian Read



VIEWPOINT

Original War is definitely a refreshing change from the RTS norm. The decision to create a strong story-based mission sequence and drop in numerous narrative events is a welcome one, and I was certainly brought into the story to a far greater degree than I was in Emperor. Also, the storyline itself is quite intriguing and, had it been done well, would be an enjoyable, albeit B-grade, sci-fi romp.

Unfortunately, the awkward voice acting and stilted method of delivery remove most of the appeal of the story, leaving the game to sink or swim on the strength of the task-based gameplay. And I just knew it wasn't going to go well when the load screen displayed "initialising grass engine." In the early missions particularly, the player will find themselves gunned down simply by choosing the wrong path and travelling east instead of west. The game quickly becomes puzzle-based; try the first path, now try the second, now the third. Also, the skill system for the player characters is poorly realised; the mechanic skill is far more useful than any of the others, especially for simple survival.

A noble attempt to bring something new to RTS, Original War falls down in the crucial areas of narrative delivery and gameplay. Better luck next time, Altar.

Anthony Fordham



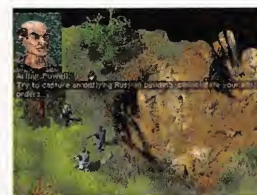
As Anthony's viewpoint mentions, Original War often seems little more than a puzzle game. Go north, and get shot. Go south, and get shot. Go east, oh going east is okay. Trundle along for a bit, then come to another intersection. Go north, and get shot. Go east and get shot... ad infinitum



The stats of each soldier can be upgraded as tasks are completed, but it quickly becomes apparent that the mechanic skill is the only one you really need

NEED
300MHz Pentium
II 64MB RAM 8MB
3D card

WANT
450MHz Pentium
II 128MB RAM
16MB 3D card,
desire to play a
puzzle-based RTS
with bad acting
and a hokey plot



FOR

- Different and challenging
- Good narrative
- Detailed unit management

AGAINST

- Shockingly horrid voice acting
- Lacklustre enemy AI
- Too many puzzle-based tasks

OVERALL

A commendable attempt to bring something new to RTS. A shame then that it failed.

74

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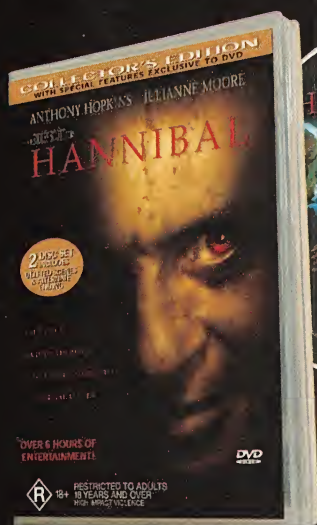
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Okay now, we've all had a good rant at Telstra's new 3Gb usage cap and how unfair it is and how it infringes our personal freedom and makes a hollow mockery of all that our forefathers fought for on the beaches at Normandy, but I say step off, step off and take another look.

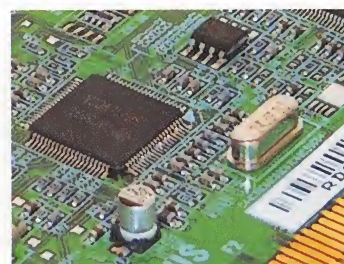
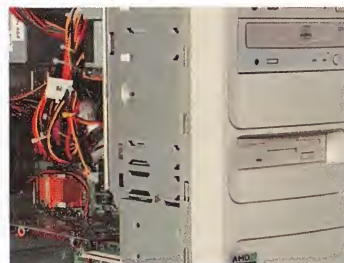
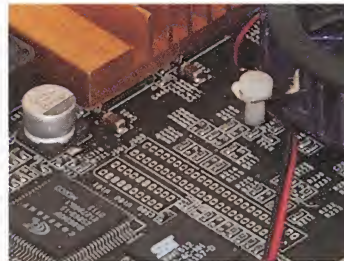
Is this 3Gb cap really that unfair? Consider the lilies in the field. They do not try to stand against the gale, they bend and flow with the wind. We too should bend and flow with the wind. After all, Telstra has done some great things for this country. They rolled out the regional telephone system with nary a hiccup. They put cable television into every suburban home at a minimum of cost and service disruption. They installed reliable and functional public telephone booths all across the nation. And finally they - through privatisation - shared their profits, the very lifeblood of the company, with us, the humble public.

Telstra is a great company and a great institution. The Bigpond Internet service has offered us connectivity second to none. Their technicians are consistently polite, helpful, and always on time. Why, when my phone stopped working because a contractor had snipped my line and put the wrong label on it, within two hours of standing at a phone booth on Croydon Station being told I had something really bad attached to my line and should go and detach it, within two hours of starting that service call I had convinced the lady on the other end to send a technician, and it was a mere three weeks before he turned up and my phone started working again. See, were it not for the 3Gb cap, Telstra simply wouldn't be able to offer that kind of service.

So I say stop whinging and think of the little man. Think of Telstra, a great Aussie battler. Think of all those technicians and exchange operators and people who put TLD on your phone for no very good reason, and the surly service-centre people, the technicians who present themselves at your door at 8am on a Sunday and just because they take their boots off think it's okay, think of the contractors, think of those little tents that appear mysteriously on street corners on rainy days, think of the payphones, think of the phonecard system and how damn well it works, think of it all.

I say 3Gb is a small price to pay for the greatest telecommunications company in the greatest country in the world. Respect.

anthonyf@next.com.au



- 76 ISP POWERTEST
- 82 MORPHEUS GEFORCE3
- 83 PHILIPS ACOUSTIC EDGE
HERCULES PROPHET 4000XT
- 84 EMAGEN VITESSE 1400DDR
- 85 MSI DV CARD
- 88 SONY PC110E HANDYCAM
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THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

- 90+** Excellent, Gold Award. A must buy.
- 80-89** Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
- 60-79** Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
- 40-59** Mediocre with little to recommend it.
- 0-39** A dog. Avoid.

Distributor The local point of contact for the product.

Price The RRP at the time of going to print.

URL Where to find further relevant information.

PHAT PIPES

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER POWERTEST BY MICHAEL WU



Originating from a research and development network established in 1969 by the US Defence Department called the ARPANET, the Internet has since grown and evolved into a global information superhighway. Millions of users in over 200 countries can share data, information and ideas in a network that spans the entire globe. Internet terms and colloquialisms such as emoticons, mp3s, Yahoo.com, spam and URLs seem to have been around for many decades but of course they have not. Their perceived maturity reflects the ever-changing expansion and the Net's growing popularity.

When it comes to Internet users, few are more demanding than gamers. Yes, we online gamers are like skinny kids with bottomless stomachs. Our food is

bandwidth - fast ping times and speedy download speeds. This nourishment allows us to demonstrate our perfectly tuned gaming skills in front of thousands of gamers in the online community. Too little sustenance can take the suave nickname you that took two weeks to come up with quickly down to the bottom of the competition ladder. Your confidence will be shattered, you'll be the laughing stock of the server and your dog will one day decide to run away for no particular reason (*Michael has dog issues - Ed*). Altogether, you'll be one really skinny and miserable kid. However it's not all gloom and doom, you do have a choice of the person handing out the grub: the Internet Service Provider (ISP). Your online gaming satisfaction depends very much on this, so the choice

of ISP is an important one.

This month we're bringing you a comprehensive look into the world of ISPs and the services they offer. There are many factors that are involved in determining a good provider. Speed, reliability, consistency, value, limits and other miscellaneous aspects all contribute to general user satisfaction. And there is no one magical equation where you plug in all the values and have it spit out an overall rating. It's not practical or realistic. This PowerTest will give you a lowdown of 17 services and the ones we recommend, from there you can make up your own mind. So brush aside that enthralling RPG for just one second, and grab hold of these very pages. It's time to get connected...



HOW WE TESTED

We determined the two most important aspects for online gamers are ping times and download speeds. The tests were created to give a good indication of performance for these two important aspects. Ping times were obtained through the pinging of the AusGamers Counter-Strike Server #1 (www.ausgamers.com.au). We were told by Robert Kaye of AusGamers that the server is run by Web Central and thus would not give a specific ISP a significant advantage over any others. Download speeds were obtained by downloading a Diablo2 patch from our very own www.pcpowerplay.com.au. All tests were completed between the times of 12pm and 3pm on weekdays and suspect results were subjected to retesting at a later date. All these procedures were followed as closely as possible to ensure an even battlefield.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROVIDERS

Apart from the general 56k-dialup access, there are also three broadband solutions in Australia - namely cable, ADSL and ISDN. Cable is probably the most prevalently used broadband service at the moment. Although it does deliver blistering speed and performance, not all areas have the luxury of cable TV running outside their street and if you live in a flat or unit, you may find getting cable access just as difficult. ADSL is an acronym for Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line and is theoretically available if there is access to a standard phone line. But the catch is that you do have to live within 3-4km of an ADSL-enabled exchange. So at the moment only major cities are getting the benefits of this service, but as the rollout train really gets rolling others will also get the opportunity. We'll also take a little look at dialup ISDN and whether it's a worthy solution.

CABLE

With a huge rollout for major metropolitan areas along the east coast, cable TV provided the infrastructure required to be the first 'true' broadband service available to Australian consumers. Cable networks are based on modified LAN technologies and the Hybrid Fibre Coax (HFC) network. The maximum bandwidth for your cable modem varies with the manufacturer of the equipment and the network design but the theoretical maximum is no more than 10 Mbs (that's mega-bits, not mega-bytes). However even if you're on a plan with uncapped speed, which I would like to mention is very very expensive and should only be attempted by the multi-millionaires among us, data may still not be streaming into your modem at 10Mbs. So what gives? As much as we all like to blame the cable providers for their incompetent services, they are not the ones directly contributing to slower-than-expected speeds, although they can minimise this problem. The one major drawback on basing Cable Internet upon modified LAN technology is that it requires users to share bandwidth. So if you have some punk kid in your neighbourhood downloading non-stop 24/7, it may very well affect your own transfer speeds. In effect, heavy users in your neighbourhood spoil the experience for others. So to quell the chances of backyard brawls involving who is responsible for the sudden ping blowout in the previous night's Counter-Strike battle, both Telstra and Optus@Home have introduced an Acceptable Usage Policy (AUP) to restrict those ultra-heavy users from congesting the networks. Although there have been some protests from users about these restrictions, especially from Telstra users, it does help reduce network congestion greatly and only affects a minority of users. But if you're willing to pay for cable and it is available in your area, it is hard to see how anyone will be disappointed by the performance.

Optus@Home

URL	www.optus@home.com.au
DOWNLOAD	325KB/s
PING	51ms

Optus cable is seen by many as a thick ugly black cable that hangs from power posts. Because of its nasty appearance, some city councils have disallowed its installation in their municipal area. This is a real shame because everyone knows ugly means performance and certainly Optus@Home is no different.

The download and ping results at the top of this column sum up the performance you'd expect. That's right, it's damn fast. Not only does it come on top in the performance stakes, it trounced its rivals with authority, winning by sizeable margins in both the download and the ping tests. With pings as low as 51ms, finally your mad rail-flick skillz will get the attention and respect they deserve.

Speaking of gaming, Optus offers its own dedicated gaming servers. Performance on these servers is generally better due to the relatively fewer 'hops' between you and the server and you're more likely to be competing with those from the same ISP with the same low pings. Games include Quake, Q2, Q3, CS, UT, Tribes and many more.

Currently there are two plans on offer. A 12-month contract with a \$199 installation fee and \$74.95 month charge, or the non-contract plan of \$598 and then \$69.95 per month thereafter. As for the AUP, well so long as you don't exceed 10 times the average customer usage, you'll keep yourself out of trouble.



Telstra BigPond

URL	www.bigpond.com/advanced
DOWNLOAD	57.8KB/s
PING	66ms

Telstra offers a few different plans for its BigPond cable users. Setup costs have no associations with the monthly charges and range from \$399 for the 3-month contract to \$189 for the 18-month contract. The two monthly plans that are worth considering are the 'Freedom Standard' and 'Freedom Deluxe'. At \$67/month, the 'Freedom Standard' plan allows for downloads at 256Kbps and uploads at 64Kbps. The 'Freedom Deluxe' plan provides double the bandwidth allowing for 512Kbps download/ 128Kbps upload at the monthly price of \$72.55. Monthly charges are subject to a \$5 discount if you choose to continue the service after the contract has ended. Both plans require the user to follow Telstra's Acceptable Usage Policy (AUP).

While Optus' AUP is quite lax, Telstra has gone regrettably hardcore. Transferring more than 3GB in a month is deemed as unacceptable and currently such actions will incur restrictions and suspensions. Slight changes to the policies will take place as of 1 October 2001 but the basic principle remains - breach the 3GB and you must pay extra or you'll have your service severely restricted for the remainder of the month. Gaming is handled by Telstra's Wireplay and Wireplay Warp gaming networks. With hundreds of games supported, you'll never play alone again. Apart from the AUP, we really have nothing to complain about, as it's great for games!



iPrimus

URL	www.iprimus.com.au
DOWNLOAD	25.5KB/s
PING	64ms

ADSL is touted as the 'Cable Killer'. From the speeds and performance we've seen from cable modems, it is a big statement indeed. But is it really the technology we all should go hotly in pursuit of with a mad glint in our eyes and our wallet wide open? That really depends on your personal circumstances and whether you have access to Cable TV. At the moment anyway, ADSL does not quite provide the value of a cable solution.

iPrimus offers two residential plans, the 256Kbps download/64Kbps upload service for \$99 a month and the 1.5Mbps/256Kbps service for \$135 a month. The monthly charges are slashed by \$14 if you're using Primus as the carrier for your local and long distance telephone calls. Both plans come with 1GB of data allowance per month. Installation costs \$275 for a 12-month contract or \$219 for an 18-month contract. Although the 1.5Mbps service is no doubt very speedy (download speeds of 153KB/s and ping times of 44ms), it is out of reach for the majority of gamers so the numbers we've included at the top of this column correspond to the 256Kbps service.

Also offered by iPrimus is an extremely fast 2Mbps/2Mbps High-Speed Digital Subscriber Line (HDSL) for businesses at a very tidy sum of \$748/month. Needless to say, that's just a little out of the price range for the average gamer.



ASDL/ISDN

For residential access, the most promising DSL technology is ADSL or Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. As the word 'Asymmetric' implies, there is a lack of symmetry somewhere. For ADSL, the lack of symmetry refers to the downstream/upstream bandwidth - as in downstream speeds are faster than those of upstream speeds. It uses a single standard "twisted pair" telephone line and utilises the frequencies that are not reserved for human speech or hearing. In other words, using an ADSL service does not interfere with the functions of your telephone (there are a few Telstra services that are exceptions to this rule) so there is no need to install a separate line. While the standard 56K modem only uses the voice spectrum to transmit data (pick up the phone while using your modem and see what I mean), ADSL technology lends itself to the much larger spectrum not reserved for voice. The result: much higher transfer speeds. Grand!

As for ISDN, well a few years ago, before the onset of cable, you may have heard salespeople ranting and raving about this technology. "Talk with Teen-Celebs through video conferencing on live web-chats" they claimed, trying to lure us into purchasing this new, and at the time very expensive technology. With the rollout of cable and ADSL, it has been firmly pushed into obscurity. However, it has made a few reappearances lately at a price rivaling that of standard dialup connections. ISDN is an acronym for Integrated Services Digital Network and requires its own standard copper telephone wire - so sharing a line with a telephone while simultaneously logged onto the Internet is not a possibility. Transmission is purely digital so it reduces noise and congestion associated with analogue modems. There are also single and dual channel options providing 64Kbps and 128Kbps bandwidth respectively. But its biggest selling point is its availability - it is probably the second most available service after standard dialup. Most of these services are beyond the financial reach of gamers, however.



Telstra BigPond ADSL

URL	www.bigpond.com/advanced
DOWNLOAD	53.4KB/s
PING	58ms

Unlike its cable internet, Telstra is continuing its rollout of ADSL at a rapid rate in which they hope will cover 90% of Australian premises within the next two years. And unlike cable, there is no need for special line installations, drilling holes in walls or anything like that. All it uses is the standard copper telephone line so even units, apartments and businesses should have no problems obtaining ADSL provided you're within range of a compatible exchange.

The two residential plans offered by Telstra are the 'Freedom Standard' and 'Freedom Deluxe'. We were able to get access to the 'Freedom Deluxe' plan for this Powertest. 'Freedom Standard' has downstream/upstream speeds of 256kpbs/64kpbs at \$94.50/month while the 'Freedom Deluxe' boast transfer speeds of 512Kbps/128kpbs at \$105.50/month. Having Telstra pre-selected for long distance calls will hand you a monthly discount of \$16.50. Both plans must follow Telstra's acceptable usage policy which includes a transfer cap of 3GB. However, downloading the latest patches and demos from the Wireplay webpage (www.wireplay.com.au) does not affect the AUP limit, which is a good thing.

So what type of people will use the ADSL service? Well, all those who want broadband but have no access to cable. This may happen if you have difficulty installing cable in your premises or that cable is not available where you live. Although generally a little more expensive and a little slower than cable, it's a good choice for the cable-less.



Vicnet ADSL

URL	www.vicnet.net.au
DOWNLOAD	13.6KB/s
PING	133ms

ISDN stands for Integrated Services Digital Network and uses your standard "twisted pair" telephone wires. Unlike the traditional analogue modem, ISDN transmits data digitally resulting in a clearer transmission with considerably less static and noise. Another thing in favour of ISDN is its superior coverage compared to that of cable and ADSL, which is just fine and dandy.

VICNET is on the verge of launching its own ISDN service with two plans especially designed for nocturnal gamers. The 'Night Owl ISDN Express' will be approximately \$22/month and will get you a 64Kbps connection, unlimited access between the hours of 8pm and 8am and a 500MB download allowance. For approximate \$38.50/month you'll have access to the 'Night Owl ISDN Plus' which will grant you an extra 500MB on the download limit. Both have a setup fee of \$11. All prices are approximate and may change upon the launch (which should have happened by the time you read this magazine). Please note that the tests we conducted were on a 128Kbps connection. For a 64Kbps line you may expect the download speed to be roughly halved (or around 6.8KB/s if you want to get mathematical) and also a slight increase in ping times. But there you have it, VICNET is offering two ISDN plans for the 'Night Owl' in all of us. Decently priced with decent speed.



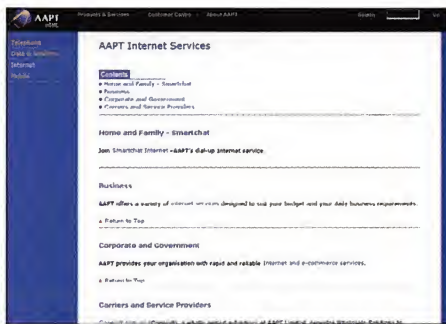
iPrimus Dialup

URL	www.iprimus.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.06KB/s
PING	126ms

Of all the ISPs reviewed in this Powertest, iPrimus is one that grabbed us by the collar and demanded our undivided attention. Both the 'Infinity' and 'Unlimited' plans are a hoot for gamers and heavy Internet users alike. The 'Bonus Infinity Metro' plan comes with unlimited time and data for only \$74.85 for a 3-month block (which equates to a low \$24.95 per month). Of course if you stay online 24-7 downloading truckloads of data, not only is it not very healthy but iPrimus may also suspend your connection. But at \$24.95 per month, certainly we're not complaining. Although only those living in metropolitan areas of large cities can take advantage of the 'Infinity' plans, those that are in less fortunate situations can still join the 'Unlimited' plans. The only difference is the download cap of 425MB per month but the price remains the same if you're willing to sign a 12-month contract. 425MB is still quite hefty for dialup users.

In our minds, one of the greatest selling points for iPrimus is the iPrimus Gaming Network (iPGN) at www.ipgn.com.au. Not only does it support popular games and mods such as CS, TFC, QW, Q2, Q3, UT, Rocket Arena, Firearms and Tribes - but the web page also spawns a whole gaming community. The site is regularly maintained with all the latest news, patches and gaming statistics.

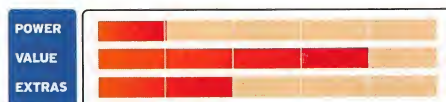




AAPT Smartchat Internet

URL	www.aapt.com.au/internet
DOWNLOAD	4.64KB/s
PING	171ms

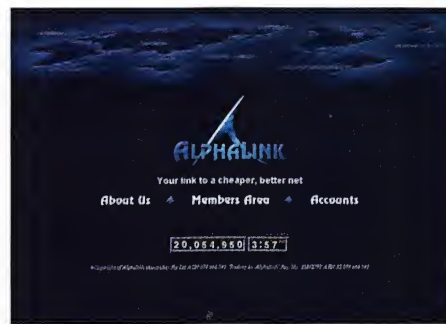
Known better for its low cost telephone services, AAPT has taken a step into Internet solutions. At \$24.95 per month, its 'Mega Plan' has allows you to surf all you like so long as you don't pass the 300MB monthly download allowance. Excess downloads will incur a charge of 27.5 cents per megabyte. AAPT also runs a little gimmick called 'Global Roaming'. It allows you to dial in to local Internet Point of Presence (POP) when visiting foreign countries at the cost of \$8 per hour. So when the urge to deathmatch is too great, you'll always be able to play no matter where you are.



Dingoblue

URL	www.dingoblue.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.31KB/s
PING	155ms

Dingoblue is an Optus ISP that gives a friendly impression with cheeky dogs on its colourful webpage. For \$35 a month you get the 'Big Byte' package with 400 hours and a monthly download cap of 1.5GB. However, if you use Dingoblues' long distance or mobile service, the monthly fee can be reduced to a mere \$25 per month. Its ping times and download speeds put it in the top bracket of dialup performers. The absence of a local dedicated game server is a bit of a shame though. Altogether it's a top performer and is great value for money if you can grab hold of the \$10 discount.



Alphalink

URL	www.alphalink.com.au
DOWNLOAD	4.23KB/s
PING	293ms

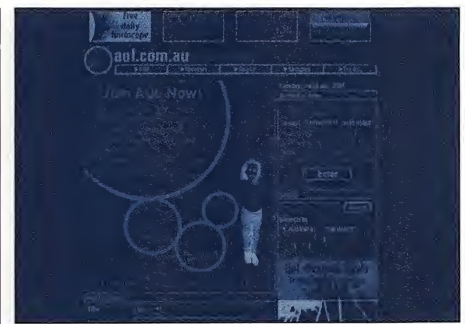
Alphalink is a budget ISP with very competitive pricing. Its 'Standard Account' includes unlimited time and a weekly transfer allowance of 200MB (this includes both inbound and outbound data) at the easy to swallow price of \$220 a year (which is around \$18.35 per month). One small drawback is how the service disconnects you after 3 continuous hours of use. Although not much an issue for some, it can become very frustrating when it occurs in the middle of an epic RTS struggle. Alphalink also has a few gaming servers supporting games such as QW, Q2, Q3 and HL. Although not the speediest service around, it is cheap as dirt.



iHug

URL	www.ihug.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.01KB/s
PING	182ms

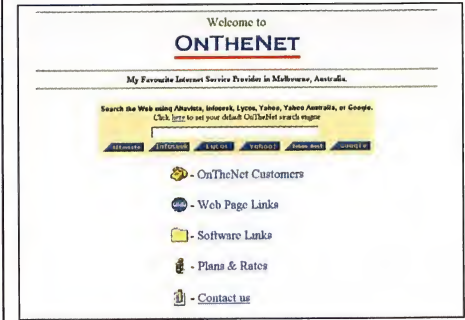
iHug caters for metropolitan areas in the cities of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Wollongong and Adelaide. The plan gamers should consider is the 'Diamond' plan which charges \$34.95 a month for unlimited time and data usage. If you're willing to pay 4 months in advance, the monthly charge comes to a low \$24.95 and if you own an active iHug Phone preselect account, further reductions can also be made. All plans include a \$19.95 setup fee. There is also a dedicated server with the likes of QW, Q2, Q3, UT and CS to keep you busy. Overall an inexpensive service that is nice and friendly - how can it not be with a smiley face in its logo?



AOL

URL	www.aol.com.au
DOWNLOAD	4.92KB/s
PING	179ms

So does it actually really happen? Do families have reunions where they dress up in orange skivvies, spell the letters A-O-L with their arms before rushing to a big modded orange computer with their jaws wide open while checking their email? Well, theoretically it can happen yes. However once they discover the frustrating nature of the AOL browser, the lack of local game servers, the non-populous gaming chat channel and a gaming forum where people ask for free copies of Warcraft2, they will rethink the questionable actions they performed moments earlier. However, at \$24.95 per month for unlimited time and data it is cheap and the performance is reasonable.



On The Net

URL	www.onthe.net.au
DOWNLOAD	3.18KB/s
PING	179ms

OnTheNet is a small Melbourne metro ISP. Their plan for heavy users, the 'Maxi Plan', provides you with 200 hours and 200MB per month at the price of \$48. So it's not the cheapest plan around, we can deal with that. But what really hit us in the gobs in its poor performance in our download speed test. Even after a second trial, the results returned were similar. We must point out we were testing the 'Maxi Plan' line and the results will not reflect some of the other more expensive plans (some of which cost \$84/month - yes we're talking about dialup here) which use different lines. Melbourne readers should avoid.





OptusNet

URL	www.optusnet.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.06KB/s
PING	149ms

OptusNet is an economical, reliable, no frills service just right for those who want to hop on and get surfing. Their NetRollover 125 and 255 plans as the names suggest give you 125 and 255 hours per month at monthly fees of \$24.95 and \$29.95 respectively. There's no download limits, no session time limits, no setup costs. Gaming can be taken care of with the Optus@Home public servers - although it especially designed for dialup users, it'll still provide fast and furious ping times. Not that finding low ping servers will be difficult though, OptusNet did return the second lowest ping for the dialup services. So hop on and get gibby!

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



Telstra BigPond Dialup

URL	www.bigpond.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.14KB/s
PING	159ms

There's no doubt that Bigpond is one of Australia's premier ISPs with top-notch performance and countrywide coverage. \$37.95 will score you 150 hours on the Bigpond 'BIG150' plan or you can choose the 'Essential' plan with unlimited time and a 300MB cap for \$24.95/month. There is however a session limit of 5 hours for the 'BIG150' and 4 hours for the 'Essential' plan. But that is only a small drawback and may even force you to take long overdue breaks. As with all Telstra Internet services, there's unlimited access to the Wireplay gaming service. That's right, all the games all the fun! Overall, a strong showing from the big fish.

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



OzEmail

URL	www.ozemail.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.01KB/s
PING	150ms

Ozemail is one of the best known Australian ISPs having been around for around 7 years. During that period, it has asserted itself as being a speedy reliable service and can be called an "industry leader". As far as suitable plans go, there's the OzE250 with 250 hours at \$49.95/month, the OzMegaSaver with 150 hours at \$37.95/month and the OzEshout plan with unlimited hours at \$24.95/month, which you'll have to sign up for in one-year blocks. All three plans allow unlimited downloads, but the lack of game servers is a little disheartening. But if it's good enough for Steve Waugh... er, then it's good enough for all cricket players

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



Vicnet Dialup

URL	www.vicnet.net.au
DOWNLOAD	5.15KB/s
PING	154ms

One of the stronger dialup performers is VICNET. Their two more popular plans are the 'Megabyte Express' and the 'Megabyte Plus' plans. Both have a one-off setup fee of \$11 and offer unlimited time with no session limits. The 'Megabyte Express' costs \$312/year (\$26/month) with a transfer limit of 300MB. The 'Megabyte Plus' plan offers a larger monthly transfer limit of 500MB at the cost of \$438.90/year (around \$36.65/month). VICNET also offer services such as home networking, on-the-spot training as well as modem-sharing and security solutions - which are great for beginners. Although the lack of gaming servers does not help push its claim, it's a strong performer nonetheless.

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	



RabbitNet

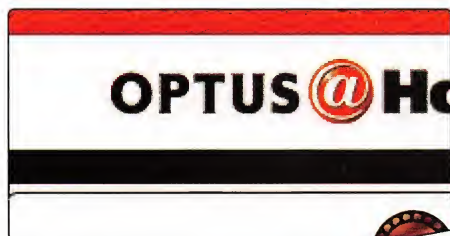
URL	www.rabbitnet.com.au
DOWNLOAD	5.21KB/s
PING	176ms

RabbitNet is another small Melbourne metropolitan ISP that provides good performance for low prices. Their current offering is that of the 'Winter 2001 Special' which costs \$220/year (around \$18.35/month) with no time restrictions or setup fee, but there is a 150MB download cap. The download cap may become a problem for hard core gamers, but won't be a problem for less 'intense' users. As with many small service providers, there are no dedicated gaming servers to speak of. But as they say, you get what you pay for. What you do get is good performance, but what you don't is a generous download cap and gaming servers. But the small price makes it worthwhile.

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	

CONCLUSION

Of the hundreds of Internet Service Providers around Australia, we've given you a low-down on some of the services you may come to expect. In the end, you'll have to make your own decision on which service suits you best in terms of availability, performance and price. And always shop smart or you may be trapped with a poor performing service and a long-term financial liability. First impressions may not always be what they seem, especially plans that seem extremely generous when compared to other plans from the same ISP. They may be totally different, inferior services with busy dial tones, packet loss and slow performance. However, it is extremely difficult to pick this but keep a keen eye out for the dial-in phone numbers and whether it's any different to that for the other plans. Lastly, usually the best way to learn about an ISP is through those that use the service. Nobody knows a service or plan better than the users themselves. They'll have first time knowledge of the network traffic at different times in the day, valuable information about peak hour performance and reliability - some aspects that were impossible for us to cover in this Powertest. Anyhow, we'll see you online!



POWER AWARD - Optus@Home

Cable Internet is the thing dreams are made of. Internet access 24-7, no phone call charges, unbeatable performance and the warm fuzzy feeling you get knowing you're online everytime you start your computer. For consumer based Internet performance, there is nothing better than Optus@Home Cable Internet. Downloads at 325KB/s and pings at 51ms, it cuts through the competition like a hot knife through butter. Can we say anymore? With numbers like those we don't really need to, it pretty much sells itself.

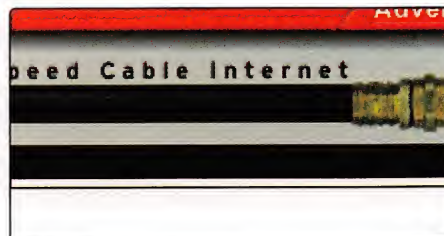
Out of all the broadband services, Optus@Home also has the most forgiving transfer limits. There is no arbitrary transfer limit, but this value is continuously calculated to being 10 times the average bandwidth consumed by the average user. This is more than enough for the online gamer, and only extreme users will find it a problem.



Not only does the service provide low pings for all the gaming servers around Australia, an Optus@Home user is also spoiled with the possibility of even lower pings on its own local gaming network. All the popular first person shooters are there, along with a few other notable ones on both the public and private servers. Currently, there is simply no faster residential broadband service in Australia.

VALUE AWARD - iPrimus Dialup

On any other given day, Telstra BigPond with its speed, reliability and excellent Wireplay gaming network would have stepped all over its opponents for yet another victory. But there is more than speed and features when it comes to choosing an ISP and that's the almighty dollar. For value, you simply cannot do any better than the iPrimus 'Infinity' plan. You receive



unlimited downloads, unlimited hours, no session limits, fast gaming servers and all this for a measly \$24.95/month. Not to mention the service is quite speedy as well. With pings as low as 126 milliseconds, not only does it leave its fellow dialup services in the dust but even beats the technologically superior ISDN. For gamers, one of iPrimus' greatest assets is the iPrimus Gaming Network. Sure it may not be as good as Wireplay; it doesn't have the capacity to support hundreds of multiplayer games. The iPGN is run by gamers, for gamers. Administrators are active members of the iPrimus gaming community by providing regularly updated news and participating on the discussion forums. Their knowledge of gamers shows through their delicate selection of the mods and games played on their servers.

A very worthy winner of the PCPP Value award.



DOWNLOAD SPEEDS (IN KBPS)

OPTUS@HOME CABLE	325
TELSTRA BIGPOND CABLE	57.8
TELSTRA BIGPOND ADSL	53.4
IPRIMUS ADSL	25.5
VICNET ISDN	13.6
DINGOBLUE	5.31
RABBITNET	5.21
VICNET DIALUP	5.15
TELSTRA BIGPOND DIALUP	5.06
IPRIMUS DIALUP	5.06
OPTUSNET	5.06
OZEMAIL	5.01
IHUG	5.01
AOL	4.92
AAPT	4.64
ALPHALINK	4.23
ONTHENET	3.18

PING (IN MILLISECONDS)

OPTUS@HOME CABLE	51
TELSTRA BIGPOND ADSL	58
IPRIMUS ADSL	64
TELSTRA BIGPOND CABLE	66
IPRIMUS DIALUP	126
VICNET ISDN	133
OPTUSNET	149
OZEMAIL	150
VICNET DIALUP	154
DINGOBLUE	155
TELSTRA BIGPOND DIALUP	159
AAPT	171
RABBITNET	176
AOL	179
ONTHENET	179
IHUG	182
ALPHALINK	293

DIALUP

CABLE

ADSL/ISDN

3D POWER

ABSOLUTE MORPHEUS GEFORCE3

DISTRIBUTOR Innovision 03 9817 7988

PRICE \$899

URL www.3dpower.com

As repeated tests have shown there is very little to separate the current GeForce3 field. The choice of card has been determined mostly by user preference rather than raw performance. Compulsive overclockers choose the Leadtek, those who prefer a slight out-of-the-box edge and TV out choose the ASUS.

Now, a new champion has arrived. The Morpheus GF3 is the most powerful, the most overclockable and the most serious GeForce3 card yet. It has been created by a group who emerged from the ashes of 3dfx, and this is reflected in the card's priorities. While 3dfx cards couldn't compete with the later nVidia chips in terms of brute fillrate, the image quality of Voodoo-base cards was always excellent, and the Morpheus marks a return to those halcyon days of fast cards which look great.

Eschewing the huge metal blob of a heatsink seen on the ASUS and Leadtek cards, the Morpheus looks more similar to the Hercules Prophet III, with a heat sink/fan combo called the ICE CUBE (yes, all caps) and two large heatsinks on the two banks of memory. The heatsinks on the memory are of a special design which boasts the best heat-transfer and dissipation rates in the business, and its clear even from the 'touch test' that the card runs very cool indeed.

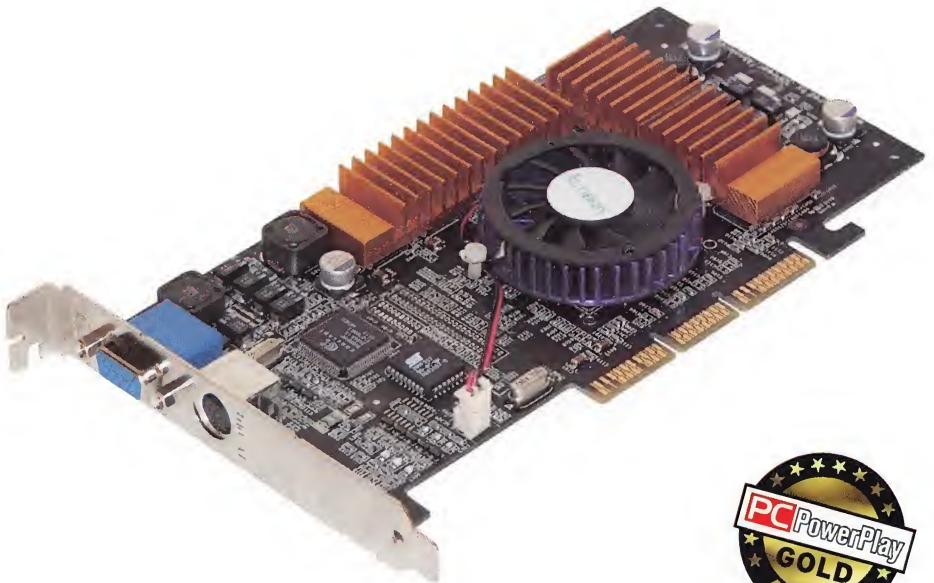
Performance, however, is paramount and the Morpheus does not disappoint. The card is aimed at pro-gamers who will primarily use it to output to a monitor. TV-out is supported, and the image quality at 800x600 is very good, but its is clear that this is only a secondary consideration.

While out-of-the-box performance is already significantly ahead of other cards, it is in the area of overclocking that the Morpheus shines. Here in the PCPP Tech Bunker we overclock using only the cooling equipment supplied with the card; we don't add any new fans or heatsinks. With this in mind, we were able to take the Morpheus up to 235MHz core and 550MHz memory, and while there was some artefacting at this speed, the card was still able to complete all benchmarks to post a very impressive 6338 in 3DMark2001 - this on a 1.4GHz Athlon-C with no FSB overclocking.

The Morpheus is aimed at experienced PC Tweakers, with very little in the box beyond a driver disk and two free games, one of which is the DirectX8-optimised DroneZ. While this is plentiful for those who aren't overclocking and for the experienced user, a more detailed guide to getting the most out of this card would have been appreciated.

At a similar price to other GF3 cards, the Morpheus is now clearly the best choice for everyone. Catering for overclockers and 'normal' users alike, it offers superior out-of-the-box performance and enormous overclocking headroom. Highly recommended.

Jack Kulyk



BENCHMARKS

TEST MACHINE The PCPP WorkBeast is: ASUS A7V266, Athlon-C 1.4GHz, 256Mb DDR RAM, ASUS V8200 GeForce3, GameTheater XP, Adaptec Ultra160 SCSI, 73Gb Seagate Cheetah 73LP 10000rpm

3D MARK 2001 1024x768x32 (3D Marks)

MORPHEUS OVERCLOCKED 235/550 6338

MORPHEUS 5916

ASUS V8200 5745

LEADTEK GEFORCE3 TD 5743

Quake 3 Arena 1280x1024x32 (frames per second)

MORPHEUS OVERCLOCKED 235/550 113.2

MORPHEUS 97.5

ASUS V8200 92.3

LEADTEK GEFORCE3 TD 91.9

FOR

- Raw speed
- Overclockability
- Runs cool

AGAINST

- No detailed manual
- Light on extras

OVERALL

King of the Kards, this monster has posted the highest benchmark results yet. Impressive as all hell

93

PHILIPS ACOUSTIC EDGE

DISTRIBUTOR Philips 1300 651 993

PRICE \$249

URL www.philips.com.au

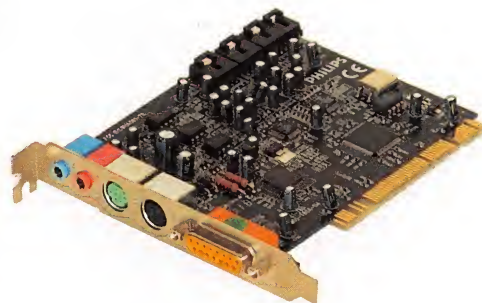
The soundcard market was, until this year, dominated by the Soundblaster Live! in all its many iterations. Then, Hercules brought a new champion into the field with the Gametheater XP. Now, a third big player hopes to muscle in on this bipolar monopoly. Philips is an enormous company producing everything from toasters to widescreen digital TVs, but the company has always kept at least one foot in the PC peripheral door. Previously, Philips has been better known for excellent monitors and a range of able speakers. Now, it prepares to move inside the PC case, with this first PCI peripheral, the Acoustic Edge.

A 5.1 channel soundcard using a proprietary ThunderBird audio accelerator, the Acoustic Edge falls somewhere between the Videologic Sonic Fury and the Soundblaster Live! DE 5.1. There are no optical ports on the card, but it does support full 5.1 surround through S/PDIF when hooked to a compatible speaker system. It also boasts the ability to 'virtualize' (a Philips word) the 5.1 experience on just two speakers.

Like the Fortissimo II from Hercules, the Acoustic Edge has two D-sub connectors on the card which hook up to an octopus-like confusion of cables, allowing for extra inputs on a single PCI device. This is especially important for non-digital 5.1 connectivity, as all the ports required would become very crowded indeed. However, it does result in a tangle-prone configuration which can get very messy behind the desk.

Sound quality is excellent; ThunderBird is an apt name indeed for this chip. Stereo sound in particular was dramatically improved thanks to Philips' QMSS - Qsound Multi SpeakerSystem. This technology positions stereo sound in four and five channel speakers, resulting in immersive surround sound - even from your Britney MP3s.

The Acoustic Edge doesn't quite reach the dizzy heights of the SBLive! Platinum or the Gametheater, but for the middle of the field it performs very well. API support is well implemented, with both A3D and EAX2.0. An excellent first effort from Philips.



Jack Kulyk

FOR

- QMSS enhances stereo
- Low CPU utilisation
- Dolby 5.1 support

AGAINST

- Fiddly cables
- No optical ports

OVERALL

Excellent midrange soundcard offering plenty of functionality and enhanced stereo support

88

HERCULES PROPHET 4000XT

DISTRIBUTOR Hercules 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$199

URL au.hercules.com

There is a tragic reality which all gamers must one day face: not everyone can afford a 21 inch monitor. In fact, such is the deprivation suffered by some, that they cannot even afford a 19 inch screen and must use 17 or even 15 inch monitors.

Obviously, these poor folk have little use for a GeForce3 or even a GeForce2 GTS. Both these cards only truly shine at higher resolutions, and if the size of your monitor restricts you to 1024x768 or lower, all that extra power is virtually wasted.

Enter the Prophet 4000XT. This card uses the Kyro chip from PowerVR. We have already seen one Kyro-based card several months ago from Videologic, and its performance necessarily trailed that of the higher-spec nVidia cards. However, a slightly higher core-clock and a very sensible price makes this new Kyro card a more attractive option.

nVidia cards focus on brute fillrate to shift units, and

typically this has been at the cost of image quality. The lower-spec GeForce2 cards, notably the MX, have very little Anti-Aliasing ability, and if FSAA is activated you can expect dramatic drops in framerate. Not so with the Prophet 4000XT. While normal performance is at MX level, activating FSAA has no significant effect on game speed. Of course things start to get grim above 1024x768, but at 800x600 with FSAA activated, you'll hardly miss the extra pixels. The Prophet 4000XT simply makes games look good.

Of course for those running large monitors, this card is hardly right for you. Also, it helps to have a decent CPU, at least an Athlon 800MHz. But for all of you out there looking to upgrade a TNT2 M64, but not yet ready to ditch the 15" monitor, the Prophet 4000XT represents a sensible, if conservative, stop-gap solution.

Jack Kulyk



FOR

- FSAA performance
- Comfortably priced
- High image quality

AGAINST

- Effectively 1024x768 max
- No T&L
- Need a medium to fast CPU

OVERALL

Limited to lower resolutions, but astounding FSAA performance results in excellent image quality

74

EMAGEN

VITESSE 1400DDR

DISTRIBUTOR Emagen 1300 880 010

PRICE \$4499

URL www.emagen.com.au

■ Appearing several months ago in PCPP#61, Emagen's first gaming system offering was heavy in 3D performance but light in extra features. This new system - dubbed the Vitesse 1400DDR thanks to its 1.4GHz Athlon CPU and DDR memory - is a more complete and fully-featured package, but correspondingly more expensive.

The system is built on MSI's K7T266 motherboard, using the Via KT266 DDR chipset. An ample 256Mb of DDR RAM gives WinME room to breathe, and the excellent ASUS V8200 GeForce3 takes care of 3D performance. Also included is the highly recommended Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM, and a 32x12x8 CD writer from LG. A SoundBlaster Live! DE 5.1 churns out the tunes, and a 56k internal modem is thankfully included along with a 10/100 network card.

Emagen ships the machine with a 19" Acer P911 professional series monitor, capable of 2048x1024 at a manageable 75Hz. While this flat-screen CRT gives a very good picture, the monitor itself is absolutely enormous, having a very long tube and wide bevel. This 19" monitor takes up as much room as a 21" screen from Sony or Philips, and obviously without the added real-estate. It's also a relatively expensive screen, costing \$1000, while some Samsung models such as the 955DF are \$100 to \$150 cheaper, perform equally well, and take up far less space.

In game tests the Vitesse 1400DDR performed excellently, as we expected from a system based on such a powerful processor/motherboard combination. The system posted a 3DMark2001 score of 5670 - slightly lower than when the same videocard was used in the PCPP Workbeast which uses the ASUS A7M266 board. Quake3 posted 92.3fps @ 1280x1024 - consistent with what we expected from a DDR system using a V8200 graphics card.

The inclusion of a CD writer is also most welcome, and the LG drive performed well for a 12x burner and didn't coasterise any of our test CDs. The machine is an adequate DVD performer with a clean crisp image on the 19" screen, and with the TV-out functionality of the V8200, making this PC the centre of your entertainment space is a no-brainer.

Emagen has improved markedly on the bare-bones nature of their previous system. The Vitesse 1400DDR includes the two extra USB ports supported by the motherboard, and while they do take up a PCI slot space, the extra power and expansion is most welcome.

Including both a modem and a network card is also a shrewd move on Emagen's part. This machine is out-of-the-box ready for both casual dialup browsing and light gaming, as well as all-night LAN action, and the Inwin case, while plain, is both roomy on the inside and low-profile on the outside. Lugging the PC around is not an impossible task.

All in all a full-featured system from Emagen that shows good design sense and provides a very competent high-end platform for serious gamers. The price is reasonable without screaming 'awesome value' but the Vitesse 1400DDR remains a solid buy

Anthony Fordham

SIZE DOES MATTER

The Vitesse 1400DDR only includes a 30Gb Western Digital hard drive. Only 30Gb? What kind of talk is that? True, in a lower-end system 30Gb would be a very generous amount of storage indeed, but up toward the \$4500 mark we expect slightly more space for our cash. One of the newer 60Gb or 80Gb drives would have been very welcome, or even a second 30Gb drive on the secondary IDE channel. However, the drive supplied is a 7200rpm model and can be thanked at least in part for the high responsiveness of the system. The little hourglass was not often encountered on the Vitesse 1400DDR

SYSTEM SPECS

CPU: Athlon-C 1.4GHz

RAM: 256Mb DDR

MOTHERBOARD: MSI K7T266 DDR

VIDEO: ASUS V8200 GeForce3 Deluxe

OPTICAL: Pioneer 16x DVD, LG 12x CD-RW

STORAGE: Western Digital 30Gb 7200rpm

MODEM: 56k Internal

MONITOR: 19" Acer P911 flat CRT

EXPANSION: 5x PCI, 1x AGP, 1x CNR, 4x USB, 2x serial, 2x parallel



FOR

- CPU/mobo combo
- CD-RW and DVD
- 3D performance

AGAINST

- Monitor very bulky
- Only 30Gb HDD
- Price a little high

OVERALL

A slick performer with a full set of features. Well worth a look for the serious gamer, but slightly pricey

84

MSI

FIREWIRE DV CAPTURE CARD

DISTRIBUTOR MSI

PRICE \$199

URL www.msi.com.tw

Assuming you have the fabulous amount of money required to own the marvellous Sony handycam also reviewed this month, you'll also need some way to get the excellent footage you've shot off the camera and on to your PC.

Enter the firewire card. Firewire was originally a competitor of USB, and were it not for the decisions of a few standards committees, everything from mice to scanners could have ended up with firewire plugs instead of the universal serial bus. Instead, firewire has survived as a more specialised connective standard, with its higher bandwidth particularly suitable for streaming video.

To this end, we have seen the emergence of a number of very cheap video capture cards that use firewire direct from a digital camera rather than an expensive S-video or VHS connection with its associated digital/analogue converters.

This card from MSI is simplicity itself. Whack it in a PCI slot, turn on the PC, wait for detection, load up the drivers and you're away. The package comes with a copy

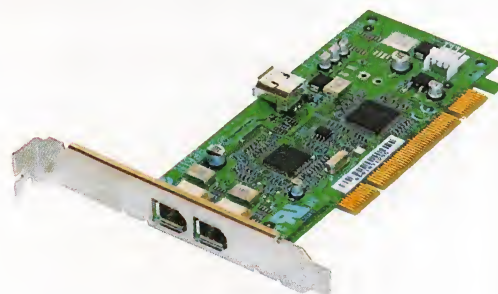
of Ulead Studio LE, which is a digital video editing package that, while not up to the standard of Premiere, still offers plenty of functionality for the home.

The package also includes a firewire cable, as some cameras don't include these. There are two external ports on the card and one internal port, should you happen to have an internal firewire device - unlikely, but it's good to know the functionality is there.

It's important to note that this product is of little use to folks with older cameras that lack digital out. Your camera will probably refer to its firewire port as a DV port or a IEEE 1384 port. The magic of firewire allows your camera to even be controlled by the PC - just plug your camera in and then do all the scanning, rewinding and viewing of footage through the PC.

Firewire also allows you to record DV-quality footage back out to the camera, making it part of your complete home movie collection. Cheap and easy to use, this DV card from MSI is a must for any video enthusiast.

Anthony Fordham



FOR

- Simple to install
- Plug-and-forget design
- Three ports

AGAINST

- Adobe Premier LE would have been preferred in software package

OVERALL

Simple to set up and powerful to use, there wasn't much for MSI to get wrong with this one. An excellent product for the enthusiast

81



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Asus 64Mb DDR V8200 Geforce3 Deluxe	\$939.00
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Logitech Cordless Optical Desktop
Microsoft Windows 98 Second Edition



AMD 1.4GHz Athlon



Asus A7M266 Motherboard



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DESKTOP THEATER 5.1 DTT3500 Digital
Total Home Entertainment Speaker Solution with Powerful Dolby® Digital 5.1 Technology



Lian-Li PC-60



Sony CPDG520

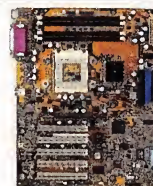
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Logitech Optical Wheelmouse
Logitech iTouch Internet Keyboard
Microsoft Windows 98 Second Edition



AMD 1.0GHz Athlon



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AOpen LX-45 ATX Midtower Case
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NetComm Internal PCI Modem
AOpen AON325 10/100 PCI Network Card
Altec Lansing ACS91 Speakers
Hansol 710P 1600x1200 17" Monitor
Logitech Optical Wheelmouse
Logitech iTouch Internet Keyboard
Microsoft Windows 98 Second Edition



Intel Pentium III 1GHz



Asus CUSL2-C Motherboard



Hercules 3D Prophet 4000XT



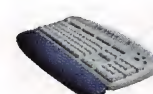
Altec-Lansing ACS91



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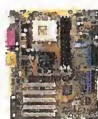
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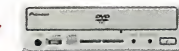
DVD Drives

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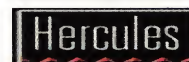
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SONY

PC110E DV HANDYCAM

DISTRIBUTOR Sony

PRICE \$4499

URL www.sony.com.au

A digital handycam is an exciting and powerful new toy that everyone serious about amateur to semi-professional video should own. The question then remains whether or not this somewhat over-featured camera from Sony represents good value for your filmmaking dollar.

The picture quality from this camera cannot be faulted. The use of a Carl Zeiss lens results in a near broadcast-quality image. Even the built-in stereo microphone has excellent pickup, although sound from more than two or three metres away falls somewhat flat.

As a video camera, the PC110E is nothing short of excellent. However, Sony has decided to cram this little camera full of dozens of extra features that, for the most part, seem to do little more than get in the way and add bulk - in both literal and financial terms.

For a start, the memory-stick reader is completely superfluous, especially with the supplied 4Mb stick, which is useful for neither still images nor video. The

camera's single-shot capability is interesting, but far better results can be obtained from even low-end digital still cameras. Also, the menu dial that allows the user to add ugly titles to their home videos positions this camera at the rank amateur, while the price suggests semi-pro. The pop-up flash also has no use for video, and would have been better replaced by a built-in light.

The camera has a firewire port for connection to a PC, and we shot a couple of hours of John playing Space Tripper and were able to edit it into a very slick little documentary with nothing more than this camera and a DV card from MSI. As an all-round video production tool, when combined with a PC this little camera is unstoppable.

If it were not for the expensive extras this camera would come more highly recommended. Even so, the quality lens and PC connectivity keeps it strong.

Anthony Fordham



FOR

- DV powerhouse
- Carl Zeiss lens
- PC connectivity

AGAINST

- Memory-stick pointless
- Too many extras...
- ...therefore over-priced

OVERALL

Excellent performer made unnecessarily expensive by bulky extras such as memory-stick

79

HERCULES

MUSE XL

DISTRIBUTOR Hercules 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$79.95

URL au.hercules.com

Constant readers will recall our soundcard PowerTest of PCPP#61, in which we gave the coveted PCPP Value Award to the Hercules Muse soundcard. This incredibly low-cost card nevertheless came with many of the features found in the more expensive cards. However, we did bemoan its lack of positional API support.

Well, Hercules has listened to its critics and come back with an updated version of the Muse, simply called the MuseXL. The most apparent user-benefit the new card brings is support for EAX2.0, bringing it up to par with the SB Live! Value.

The card has support for 4-speaker surround, making it an excellent companion to a beefy setup such as the Philips A3.500 w00x speakers. This was the configuration we tried, and we found the bass particularly chunky, while higher frequencies were crisp and detailed. The card also works admirably with a stereo setup, and our MP3 collection never sounded so good.

Line levels are important and we were pleased to see the MuseXL able to pump it out at quite a high volume. In fact, we found this card to be louder out-of-the-box than the GametheaterXP with our speakers, although the higher-powered Gametheater does win out after some adjustment. DVD performance is also less than spectacular, owing to the lack of Dolby 5.1 support.

All in all it's a very good thing to see Hercules updating the redoubtable Muse, and the MuseXL continues in the great Muse tradition and remains our budget card of choice. The card is now made even more attractive with support for EAX2.0. If Hercules can take this budget model and pack in even more functionality - especially Dolby 5.1 - then paying more than \$100 for a sound card could wind up a thing of the past.

Jack Kulyk



FOR

- EAX2.0 support
- Four-speaker support
- Excellent sound, low cost!

AGAINST

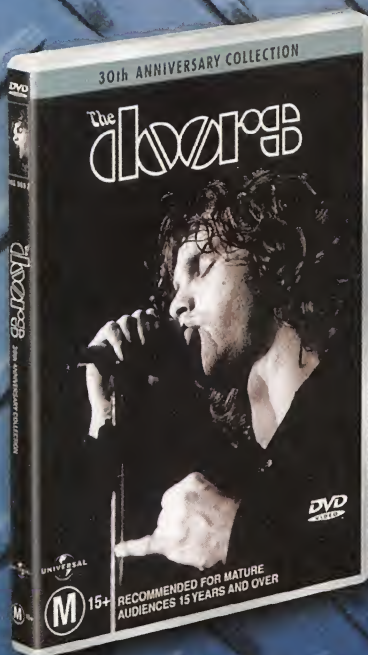
- CPU usage a little high
- Max power a little low
- Now we want Dolby 5.1!

OVERALL

The only sensible option for budget sound, the MuseXL proves once and for all that cheap is anything but nasty

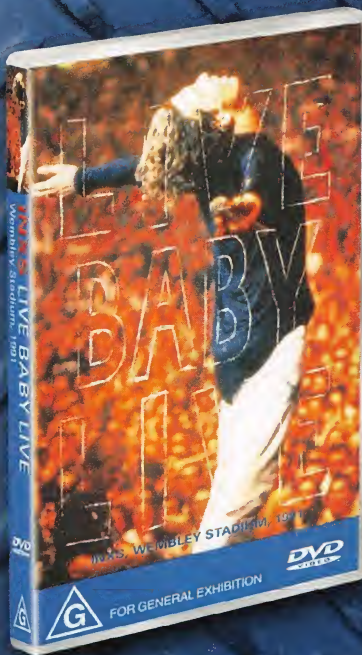
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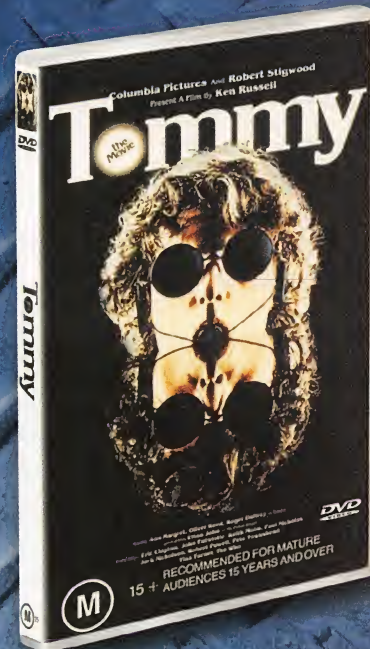


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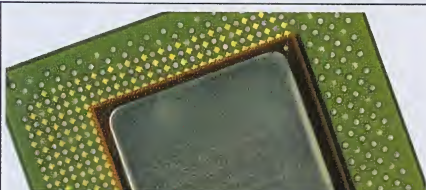
THE BEAST

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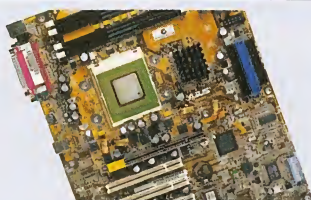


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ASUS P4T Motherboard

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\$429 www.achieva.com.au



256Mb RDRAM

This stuff is still pretty pricey, but if want the P4 performance you have to shell out for it.
\$450 www.westgroup.com.au



Thermaltake Indigo Orb

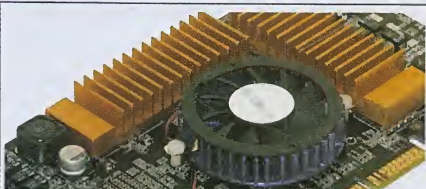
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Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000

Hellishly expensive, but you get what you pay for. Heavy beats and crisp treble. Totally Beastly.
\$1399 www.bostonacoustics.com



Sennheiser HD265 Headphones

Perfect for getting the edge at the next LAN
\$325

Hercules DV Action

For those wishing to dabble in video. Cheap and simple.
\$199 Hercules 02 8303 1818

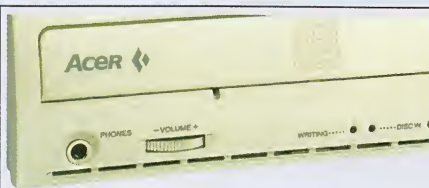


STORAGE AND OPTICAL



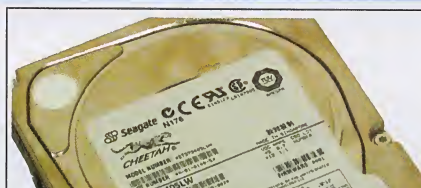
Panasonic SR-8586 B 16x DVD-ROM

Keeps those Thunderbirds episodes smooth and can also read DVD-RAM. Versatile and not too pricey.
\$180 www.panasonic.com.au



Acer 20x10x40 CD-RW

The most reliable 20x burner we've encountered. That's right, it can actually burn at 20 speed!
\$380 www.auspcmarket.com.au



Seagate Cheetah 73LP 73Gb HDD

Okay so it's super amazingly expensive, but it's the fastest big drive we've encountered so far.
\$1978 www.seagate.com.au



Panasonic 3.5" Floppy

Just in case you need to reinstall Windows.
\$39 www.auspcmarket.com.au

Adaptec 29160 SCSI

You'll need this fella for your Cheetah.
\$529 www.adaptec.com



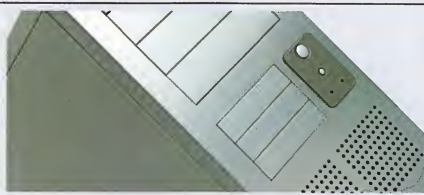
PHYSICALITY AND INPUT



Philips 201P 21" Monitor

Big is beautiful, and this monitor is both. Flat screen, crisp colours, short tube and reasonable price.

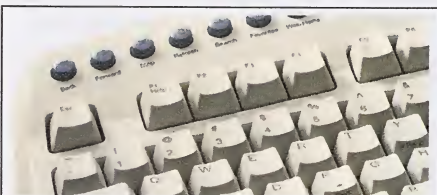
\$2295 Philips 1300 651 993



Lian Li PC-60 ATX Aluminium Case

Solid, shiny and spacious, this case is another Beast veteran that isn't going anywhere soon.

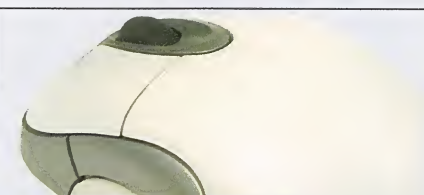
\$399 www.auspcmarket.com.au



Microsoft Internet Keyboard

As our PowerTest in PCPP#64 showed, this is the slickest, smoothest keyboard in the business.

\$55 www.microsoft.com



Microsoft Wheelmouse Optical

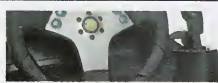
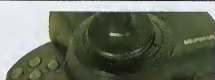
Ergonomically perfect and immune to the hideous black gunk that plagues all ball-based mice.

\$55 www.microsoft.com

Microsoft Sidewinder Force-Feedback

Take control! Fly the hostile skies with the chunkiest stick in the biz.

\$199 www.microsoft.com



Thrustmaster Formula Pro Digital

Perfect control, this wheel is another PCPP#64 PowerTest winner. Respect.

Thrustmaster 02 8303 1818 \$149

TOTAL BEAST VALUE

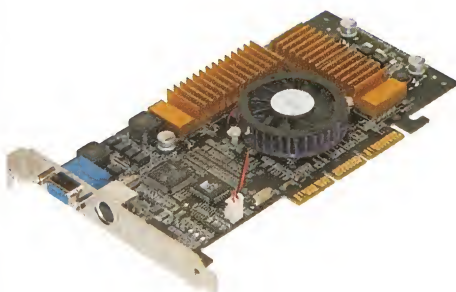
\$12500

LATEST ADDITION

Absolute Morpheus GeForce3

Innovation 03 9817 7988

\$899 www.3dpower.com



It almost feels as if the GeForce3 has been around all year, but until now we've never been able to honestly say which card is above and beyond the best for your Beast. We've tried the Hercules Prophet III and the ASUS V8200, and while both are excellent cards, they tended to err on the side of 'take it out of the box, stick it in the PC and don't touch it.' The Leadtek card had fairly good overclocking potential, but its out-of-the-box performance was slightly below the ASUS, and remember that in the Beast, performance is the only consideration. The Morpheus then marks a meeting of the two videocard worlds. It screams out of the box, and it begs to take all the overclocking punishment you can dish out. With specialised RAM coolers and an active heatsink, it's also the coolest GeForce3 we've encountered. And crazily enough, it's not even the dearest.



BEASTIE



Duron 800

Still the best value Duron, and fast enough for most games.

\$145

256Mb PC-133 RAM

Having the quarter-gig is more important than DDR.

\$110



ABit KT7E

KT133E chipset equals \$100 saving on motherboard.

\$248

30Gb Seagate U Series

Reliable and quick enough for Beastie work.

\$300



ASUS 50x CD-ROM

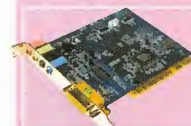
Quick, cheap, reliable. What else do you need?

\$88

ASUS V7100 MX400

It's a 64Mb GeForce2 MX, and the extra performance shows.

\$250



Hercules MuseXL

Budget soundcard, but supports EAX2.0 and it's loud!

\$70

Samsung 753DF

Cheap flat screen 17" monitor with a fabulous picture.

\$490



AOpen HQ45

It's got funky blue styling, it's roomy, and it's cheap. PSU inc.

\$138

Sony 2-Series

A neat little pair of speakers that can really pump it out.

\$115



TOTAL BEASTIE VALUE

\$1999

SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
NATHANAEL JEANNERET WAXES TECHNICAL
Q> GHOST IN THE PC

Having been a dedicated subscriber since the day Duke Nukem graced the front page of your almighty mag (He means PCPP#1 - Ed), I thought it was time I wrote to you with a question, which has been bugging me for some time. I'll start by saying Windows 98 really annoys me the way it seems to house so much crap when you add/remove software. It's on your advice that I format my C: drive about every 6 months as it seems the only way to get rid of all the grit that is usually left behind. I have heard that it is possible to make a "ghost CD", in other words, it's a CD which contains all the basic things such as downloaded updates, browser settings and the like. So when I format I can just put the CD in the drive and it will load all the critical updates and settings without having to insert disk after disk. More or less like a raw set-up CD that will do it all in one hit. Please, please, please help...

Mondo

A> Yes, you have heard correctly. The product you are referring to is Norton's Ghost. After you have installed Windows and done your basic configuration, Ghost allows you to make a complete copy of all the Windows install files, and anything else that you flag. Then you can put that 'image' onto CD or back it up across your network. When it all turns to a pile of Windows poo, you just boot off the Norton's boot disk and away you go. It takes around 10 to 15 minutes to restore your system to shiny new again.

Wheel mouse for \$80. It worked crystal clear for a couple of months and then after those perfect couple of months, an hour or so of use would make the mouse "glitch" (Only if I moved the mouse fast or suddenly). Now after another month or two of agony it "glitches" even when I move it very slowly. I have found that if

it's on for a long period of time it glitches more and even worse, so maybe it might be overheating. I tried to get new drivers but found out I had the latest ones (IntelliPoint 3.2). I used to plug the mouse into the standard PS/2 port but then I thought why not plug it into the USB port? So I did, and noticed no difference at all. I looked at some user opinions on the drivers and found out they had the same problems. I also heard the wiring was bad and the cord would literally fall out of the mouse after a year or so. Because I trust them, I wouldn't expect Microsoft to make faulty drivers or hardware, so I don't have a clue what the problem could be. Any help would be very much appreciated.

WeBaStaR

A> It does indeed sound to me very much like you've got a wiring problem. Your diagnosis of heat could also be correct, you see, when wires heat up they expand, and this can sometimes cause electronic devices to short out. The combination of a wire being closer than it should be to another, and the heat expansion thing may explain your strange mouse problems.

Q> LETTER FROM THE KING!

Which IDE ports do I hook my burner, CD drive and hard drive to, to get the best performance? Should I put the two CD drives on the same IDE cable? Does it make any difference? What would you suggest??

Elvis

A> The general school of thought dictates that you put the HDD on the primary channel, with CD-ROM's on the same channel, as they have a lower access speed and data throughput. A higher proportion of motherboards these days have more than 2 IDE channels, usually the extra 2 are running off a dedicated ATA100 controller.

Q> FUZZY BITS

What's doing with my PC? Starting a few months ago I noticed that I was getting distortion lines every time I maximized or minimized a window. This distortion thing then manifested itself as a black line (thin yet noticeable) running throughout the center of some of my desktop icons. After I installed the latest driver (12.41-W9X) for my GeForce 256 card the black lines have disappeared yet the fuzziness has remained. This can get extremely annoying as the distortion sometimes obscures fonts making them difficult to read.

I think it could be a couple of things. First, and most likely I think I might of damaged the 32 Megs of RAM on board the graphics card. You see, on occasions I have to entirely unplug the power cord while the PC is in a semi-on stalled state due to my temperamental power supply. I don't think my graphics card is appreciating this.

Can you please explain what's going on, or give me an educated guess. And tell me what to do next if there is anything I can do?

Rob.

A> It's possible that you have damaged the card by turning it off, whenever possible, try to use the proper methods to shutdown your PC. It may also be a good idea to replace your power supply. I do think that there may be hope for your machine, the fuzziness may be because of the refresh rate that your video card is set at. Right-click on the desktop and select 'properties' and go to the settings tab. Look for the advanced tab. Depending on the driver software you have installed there should be a tab marked 'adaptor' in that box you should be able to select the refresh rates. Normally it should be set to 'optimal' but try any settings above 60 Hz. If any reader experiences heaps of eyestrain when using computers, check your refresh rate.

Q> MY COMPUTER IS SENTIENT

1) My computer likes to think for itself. It's decides to turn my WAV volume right down to nothing so every time I open or play a new song, I have to go into Volume Control and turn it up again. My friend also has a similar problem except his volume


Q> I TRUSTED THEM

I bought a new computer in March 2001. Since I was spending so much money I decided to buy a mouse worthy of it, an MS Optical

SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

NATHANAEL JEANNERET WAXES TECHNICAL

control balance seems to go all the way to the left. What can I do to solve this annoying problem?

2) I have an old PC that I am upgrading soon (very soon) and it's monitor is an old one (the computer is 5 or 6 years old). My problem is that the settings have been all screwed with and it is all wobbly. Is there any way I can get it straight again apart from fiddling with it, cause I have done that and it's far too time consuming. Please help! And keep up the good work with the Mag.

Ham ish

A> The problem with the sound control panel resetting itself is annoying isn't it? All you need to do is set the settings how you like them in the Windows audio mixer and when you go to close it, simply hold down the shift key as you close the window. This works for a bunch of other Windows functions, basically it saves the layout as you like it, experiment!

If you monitor is no longer saving your settings, then there is not much that we can do for you, if the whole image itself is wobbly, then take a look at the refresh rates thing I pointed out above.

Q> ALTERING RAM ISSUES

I have an Asus CUSL2-C mobo, and P3-933 CPU, SB Live! and GeForce2 MX 32Mb running WinME. I had two 128Mb PC-133 sticks of RAM, and I recently swapped one and paid a few dollars extra to get a 256Mb PC-133 stick so I had 384Mb. Then gave 128mb stick to girlfriend so now I have single stick of 256Mb ram. At first no issues but now, some 24 hours later I am getting a "pause" from my machine about every ten seconds or so. This happens no matter what the machine is doing, whether gaming, surfing, moving mouse pointer in a circle on my desktop or just typing an email to a 'puter guru.

I think it is connected to the RAM since I have had similar problems in the past, but never so constant or so shortly spaced. The only way I have ever been able to correct it is to format. My theory is that Windows NEEDS the RAM size and configuration to be the same as when it is installed otherwise it goes FUBAR. Am I right? Is there a way to fix this? AM I THE ONLY ONE???

Jason

A> The only one tearing his hair out over Windows? I think not. But nastiness aside, you should be able to install and take out RAM as much as you please. A major factor to think about is making sure that your virtual memory settings have been adjusted to suit your new amount of RAM. If you are running WinME try

a roll-back to before the problems started occurring, alternatively nab that stick of 128 and drop it back into your PC again. Next you need to reset your bios back to defaults, and then to the performance defaults, and see if that doesn't flush out your little problem.

Q> DAMNED VXD'S AGAIN

Ever since my computer has come back from the repairer after having (in their words) a corrupt hard drive, I have been having some problems playing Half-Life. The hard drive was formatted and they installed the drivers for all hardware except my modem. Every time I try to play I am greeted with a blue screen stating;

A FATAL EXCEPTION HAS OCCURED AT
0028:C1888983 IN VxD DSOUND(03)+ 0000 8AB3
WAS CALLED FROM 00.28:C1648A7 IN VxD
DSOUND(01) 00000697.

I'm guessing it has something to do with my SB Live! sound card. Also, after I press any key to continue my PC freezes and even pressing CTRL+ALT+DEL won't work. Please tell me what it is and how I can fix it.

OuTkAsT

A> Reinstall your sound card software, and reinstall Direct X. What's happened is that the VXD file (Virtual Device Driver) for your soundcard has been corrupted. You computer has called on a resource (in this case your sound card) and because there is no reply you get a system hang. I would also demand that your local repairer fix this, as if it didn't do this before, and it does it now, then it's his responsibility to take care of you.

Q> QUALITY SOUND.

How do the High priced PC speakers stack up against a home stereo system, If I could afford to buy one decent sound system, which would be a better choice?

Justin

A> Computer sound systems don't do very well when compared to high-end component audio systems, but okay when compared to integrated systems (all-in-one type). Until of course, when you get to reference monitors... mmmn Questeds... drool... Sorry where was I? Oh yeah. Generally you will get better sound out of component audio systems, especially in sheer terms of volume. Because of the competitive nature of the computer business, you can get a



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Q> IN OR OUT?

I'll give it to you nice, short and simple. Which kind of Modem is better, an internal one or an external one? And of course, why?

run_to_the_max

A> There has been a lot of myths floating around this particular subject. Generally external modems have been proven to be better, but probably not because of the reason that you think. The vast majority of internal modems floating around in the market are based on the one chipset (Rockwell / Motorola Connexant) Much like the way nVidia licenses out their technology and lets the board makers integrate it into cards, we get varying levels of quality. This in itself doesn't mean that all internal modems are crap, but most people when faced with a \$120.00 external modem, and a \$80.00 internal, choose the internal. You also pay extra on an external, because you pay for an external power supply unit, plastic casing and a retail box, and of course, the cool little red LED's. When in the market to buy a better than average modem, internal or external, look at brands like Banksia, and 3com.

fully integrated 4-point system for less than a hundred dollars. The quality, is well, awful, and the saying 'you get what you pay for' springs to mind. If you are going to spend sub \$1200 then I'd suggest that you look at PC speakers, and above that, then its time to get serious.

Q> UNDER INTERROGATION...

I was thinking of getting a new computer & a number of questions popped up from nowhere.

1) I read somewhere that having multiple DIMMs installed would be a tiny little bit faster than a single DIMM of the same size. Please explain. I was wondering

SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
NATHANAEL JEANNERET WAXES TECHNICAL

this because even though the difference would be insignificant, two 128MB RAM modules cost less than a 256MB module, which I was going to get out of convenience. If saving that little bit would give me that little bit more performance, then all the better.

2) In WinME, what is System Protect? Would it greatly affect game performance even on a Duron850 system?

3) Can (unlocked) Durons be run at 133MHz FSB on KT133A chipsets?

4) What is the maximum safe temp. & voltage increase AMD SocketA chips (esp. Duron) could run at?

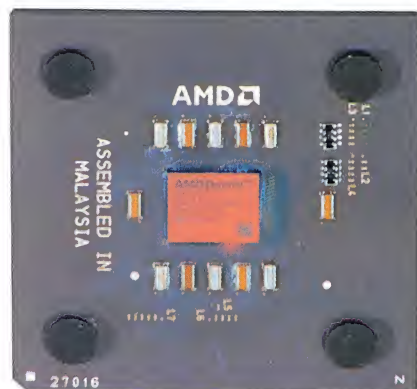
Skeptik

A> 1) Logically, yes... and no. In terms of access across larger amounts of information stored in RAM then you may have a tiny decrease (not noticeable) in speed with multiple modules, but only the most 'hard kore' of system builders would even be able to benchmark the difference. You would do better to buy some slightly higher quality ram, such as Kingmax or Corsair, and set the ram latency settings in the BIOS to 2-2-2, which should give a more substantial speed boost.

2) I take it you are referring to Window's new rollback feature. It does randomly back up files during the course of normal Windows operations, and can enable when you are doing other stuff like playing games. It can cause a little slowdown, and if you feel you can recover your system from a bad software install manually, then it's fine to disable it.

3) The FSB increase may be too large, and although the processor may handle it fine, the other devices in your system probably won't.

4) The accepted maximum temperature is around the 60 degrees mark. Voltage maximum on most boards is 1.85volts, you will find that running a CPU at standard speed at that voltage may cause instability.



Q> DISABLING A: DRIVE

I recently set up a second computer for a home network out of upgrade remnants, but I only have one A: drive between the two. I don't necessarily need it and don't want to buy another when I never use it anyway. The computer without the floppy drive has a CD-RW for external storage, and the only time I foresee that I'll need the A: drive is for re-formatting the system etc (boot disk). Can I disable the A: drive on this computer so that it will not try to access the A: drive, as it plays havoc when it looks for it? I have disabled the A: drive in the boot sequence and hardware profile, but it still appears in explorer and the computer still searches for it sometimes.

Andrew

A> Yes, you can disable the floppy drive from within the BIOS. Just select 'Disable floppy seek at startup.' With Windows98SE and onwards, you can boot off the CD-ROM drive to re-install an OS or format the drive, if that helps too. All you need to do is to change the boot order so that your CD-ROM drive is the first to boot, and then put your Windows CD drive. With Windows2000 and WinME, you need a boot disk to gain access the prompt after you have installed those Operating Systems, but you can boot off CD to install those OS's onto a clean HDD.

Q> LOST MY CREATIVITY

I have a creative SB Live! value sound card, and every time I try to play any Movie files eg Avi, Mpeg, DivX the system crashes and the computer resets itself. If I remove the Live card and use the onboard sound (AC97 audio) it works fine. I have emailed both Creative who couldn't help and MSI Australia who didn't answer.

TECH TIPS #1 CASE THE JOINT!

The single most overlooked PC component, the case, is enjoying a bit of a renaissance at the moment. Folks are spraying them, illuminating them, and super cooling them. The simple fact is however, that you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. What I'm talking about here is quality folks, a good, solidly built case will see you clear of many a LAN or just make working on the wee beastie a bit more enjoyable. Ways to identify a good case include; take the outer cover off and see whether you can move the frame about, feel (carefully) for sharp edges and burrs on the frame, and the more steel you see the better. Good brands include AOpen, IN-Win, and Lian-Li & MaCase.

The sound card was in my old system and didn't give me any problems at all, I have updated the bios and that hasn't helped any help would be greatly appreciated as I would really like to be able to use the Live! card.

Syd

A> Bummer! First thing to do is to disable the AC97 in the BIOS. You should be able to find a section that says; "Disable On-Board Sound". Once that is disabled, you need to make sure that Windows is not still trying to use it. Go to the Control Panels and open up System. In the device manager tab, you should be able to see the sounds and multimedia heading. Expand it and delete ALL the listed files. Click okay and restart. Now re-install the driver files for the SBLive!

Q> DVD AND IDE SHENANIGANS.

I remember reading somewhere that DVD's will be double sided and have two layers on each side. But someone told me that these DVD aren't out yet, who is right? If they aren't out yet, does that mean we have to buy new DVD players when they do? Or can the current players use these twin layered DVD's?

Also I recently installed a new CD-RW, and found that the Secondary IDE channel on my motherboard doesn't work. All my devices work fine on the Primary. I have enabled both IDE channels in BIOS and Windows but it still doesn't work. Is there some other problem? Or is my motherboard just f*%#^d? It is a socket 7 motherboard but I have no idea what kind it is other than that.

Tim


SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

NATHANAEL JEANNERET WAXES TECHNICAL

A> The DVDs that are currently available on the market are both dual sided and double layered, most movie releases don't use the capacity. Most current consumer players should be compatible, as this was part of the original DVD specification.

It's possible that the channel doesn't work, but firstly you need to change the jumper settings for the drive from master to slave and vice versa. It is a common mistake to either miss the jumpers all together, or to simply get the settings wrong.

Q> PRE-LOAD PROBLEMS

Hear my humble plea as I beg for the soul of my dodgy gaming rig. My computer is a Pentium III 500 with 256MB RAM, a partitioned 10GB HD, a DVD and a CDR drive running Windows 98. I recently formatted one side of my hard drive (C:) and I accidentally put in the preload disk instead of the good old Microsoft boot disk to start the formatting. After realizing my mistake, I put the right disk in and the format worked ok, but now every time I start my computer I get the remnants of what looks like a preload...

Edit - A whole bunch of error messages. (You too can have at home, if you throw your win.ini and autoexec.bat in a blender with a chicken...)

- 1: What is a Windows 98 preload anyway?
- 2: What is my computer trying to copy?
- 3: HOW DO I GET RID OF IT????!!

I'd really appreciate any info you could give on this, because it's never happened before and I have no experience on how to fix the bugger!

Darksaber

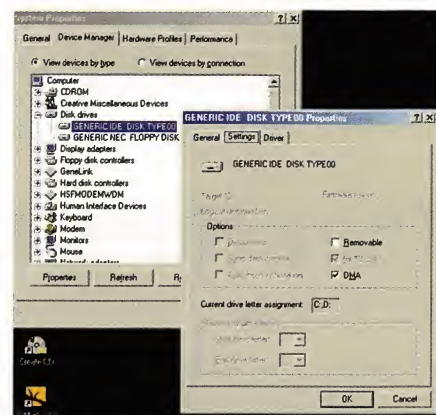
A> It's what happens when Windows initially sets itself up. Because when you setup Windows on a clean HDD, it has to transfer a version of its startup files so that the Machine can restart successfully half way through the Windows install. I can only assume that's what has happened here. So, imagine if you will, Windows is trying to start its install program again. You may be able to remedy the problem by booting into the DOS prompt, (press F8 after the BIOS screen, or use a boot disk) and re-installing Windows over the top of your existing install. Given the situation, it may just be time for a clean install of Windows.

TECH TIPS #2 YOU'RE DMA MAN!

DMA is not a rapper you haven't heard of yet, it's Direct Memory Access, it allows your PC to use your HDD in a much speedier fashion, independent of your CPU. It is not turned on as default, because some Hard disks cannot support it. However, the vast majority of current systems should do. If in doubt, then check with your HDD manufacturer. All you need to do to turn DMA mode on for your HDD is;

Control Panels / System / Device Manager Tab / Disk Drives / IDE HDD / Properties button.

Within that panel you can set the DMA mode just by clicking in the box and saving and restarting. Tada! you now had access to slightly better HDD speed, DVD playback and CD burning reliability.



Q> WHY NOT OVERCLOCK?

Well I just got a new Pentium 4 1400mhz with 128Mb RDRAM (400mhz bus) WOOHOO! I went to the BIOS and saw that I could overclock it to 1540mhz with 440mhz-bus speed. Now, I was concerned that if I did that it'll heat up the machine and have problems. Would it?

Madmofo

A> Yes your PC will spontaneously combust... well actually no... It shouldn't be a problem to squeeze another 140Mhz out of the Pentium 4. The way to deal with heat is to record the temperature that your CPU runs at stock speed, and then by the smallest increments possible, increase the FSB until it is either no longer stable or cool, or both. By 'cool' anything above 60 degrees is starting to get worrying. With sufficient cooling you should have no problems.

Q> MAINTENANCE MAN!

1) About once a month I spend a day running DiskDoctor, SpeedDisk WinDoctor and RegCleaner. I was wondering what effects the CPU speed, amount of RAM and hard drive size has on the speed of running these programs?

2) I have a Diamond Data 10x4x32 CDRW. Whenever I try to write at 10X, the buffer runs out. I have an AMD

800 MHz with 128 MB RAM. How can I fix this problem? The reason we got a 10X burner was because it was meant to be fast.

Andrew

A> 1) These are all good habits, with the caution that most of the time they have a minimal effect on performance, and some of those automatic system maintenance programs can cause more trouble than they save you from. Simply be aware of what they actually do, and if they ask to delete files and you are not sure, then use the backup option. When running this kind of maintenance operation, the speed of your HDD can actually be the speed-limiting factor. Because of the basic nature of most maintenance programs, the raw speed is usually determined by the amount of sheer data that your system can process.

2) The problem does not lie with your burner; it is indeed fast. Try enabling DMA mode for your HDD, you will find this option in Control Panels / System / System Profile / Hard disks / Properties. You should also look at defragging your HDD on a regular basis and don't run anything at the same time as when you are burning. The easy way to test whether another program is interfering is go to the Start Menu / Run / Then Type msconfig. Go to the Startup tab, and de-select everything there. Save changes, reboot and try to burn at full speed. If this resolves your problem then individually turn on the options again within the msconfig application.

WRITE TO

SETUP, PC POWERPLAY, PO BOX 634, STRAWBERRY HILLS, NSW. 2016

setup@pcpower, play.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC. Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

gameplay

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR GAMES

They Hunger 3

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR HALF-LIFE MODS HITS TRILOGY STATUS

While most of the mod scene tends to revolve around multiplayer mods, it can become easy to forget just how many quality singleplayer focused mod teams are out there. A lot of these really do seem to get overlooked in the hustle and bustle of the hectic multiplayer scene, but it's heartening to see one such mod gain enough of a following to warrant not just one, but two sequels.

The They Hunger series of mods still contain a multiplayer component, but the main focus lies in creating a singleplayer mod planted squarely in the survival horror genre of gaming. Which, for those of you who haven't experienced it, is basically like playing "that woman who screams too much in Michael Jackson's Thriller clip"... but usually with more weapons lying handily about.

The third episode in the series begins directly after the events of the conclusion of the second (which I won't spoil for those of you who haven't played it yet), waking up out of a nightmare sequence to find yourself lying in a hospital bed with no idea how you got there - and, more importantly, no idea just where everyone else is! The only sign of life around you, in fact, is the sound of a baby crying eerily in the distance (*Aargh! Max Payne alert! - Ed*). It's up to you to try and find out just what's happening, as well as to simply stay alive!

One of the hallmarks of the They Hunger series is the excellent and creepy atmosphere that developer, Black Widow, has managed to create. Eerie sound effects and lighting are used to excellent effect to build tension, with well-crafted character models to back them up.

Meanwhile, They Hunger 3 isn't quite as run-and-gun as your standard firstperson shooter. The going can still get fairly lead-heavy from time to time, of course, but those who look to mods for new and varied crazy weapons should look elsewhere. In fact, many of the

weapons in TH3 are simply weapons from either Half-Life or Team Fortress Classic. The wrench, umbrella, chain gun and flamethrower all make appearances, a couple of which actually run the risk of throwing the general "I'm a normal guy trapped in an abnormal situation" deal somewhat askew. Overall, though, their placement and use tends to be limited enough that it doesn't really detract from the overall tension of the experience.

Fortunately, it's as an experience rather than a shooter that TH3 should really be judged. It's based on ageing technology and it possibly runs a little too close to predictable (scare-wise) at times, but overall it hits just the right marks to make you want to keep on playing. With TH3, Black Widow has shown they're still the kings of the singleplayer mod scene.



They Hunger 3: Rude Awakening

For: Half-Life version 1.1.0.4 or higher

Version: 1.0

URL: www.planethalflife.com/manke

Score: 90%

Alliance CTF

SOME CUSTOMISED QUAKE 3 CTF ACTION!

If you're tired of Quake 3's limited options in multiplayer, chances are you've stumbled across Alliance CTF before. Now up to a venerable version 2.5, it's one of those mods that has been around for quite some time, but tends to get lost in the crowd.

Alliance offers several adjustments to standard Quake 3 gameplay. It can be played in capture the flag, free-for-all, or team deathmatch modes, each of which can be put into Alliance (standard), Combat (start with lots of weapons and lots of ammo), or InstaGib (rail guns for all!) modes.

On top of this, Alliance's main changes come in



the form of an offhand grappling hook to keep the gameplay fast and furious, and several new and adjusted weapons: Pistol - a weapon you get when spawning, it has unlimited ammo and packs a punch; Shredder - another spawn weapon, it replaces the gauntlet and is, well, kind of a gauntlet with a bigger blade, I suppose; Mini Gun - essentially the chain gun from Quake 2, it replaces the machine gun and isn't given to the player on spawning; Grenades - explode after a certain amount of time, or upon contact with a player.

While all of the changes are well implemented, they generally wouldn't be enough to recommend giving Alliance a try normally. It's fortunate, then, that the downloadable Alliance maps are very well constructed, tailored perfectly to the fast-paced (and often confusing) gameplay its grappling hook allows for. There are also several changes in the form of various HUD and menu adjustments, runes (holdable powerups), and even the odd Wizard's Eye spell that will let you take a look through a level without having to stick your neck outside of cover.

Overall, Alliance CTF provides some interesting changes to the existing Quake 3 gameplay, but this will really only be helpful to those of you who aren't too experienced when it comes to grabbing mods. For those of you who are well into playing the latest and greatest, though, chances are you've seen almost everything Alliance provides before - not necessarily done better, mind you, as it's a very professionally done mod, but it may tend to feel like not enough of a change to make it worthwhile to veterans.

Alliance CTF

For: Quake 3

Version: 2.5

URL: www.planetquake.com/alliance

Score: 82%

IN DEVELOPMENT

AN AMBITIOUS FLASHPOINT MOD GETS ROLLING



If there's one thing you can't accuse the guys working on this mod of, it's a lack of ambition. The aim of Operation: Vietnam is to faithfully recreate the famous battles of the Vietnam War using the Operation: Flashpoint engine and editing tools, and do it in detail.

This will be no mean feat, of course, with Flashpoint's European release not sporting any true jungle environments. However, given its recent release, the team seem to be flying along at a rapid rate, with their site already sporting screenshots of some rather excellent-looking (though as-yet unskinned) models of various pieces of military equipment and vehicles circa Vietnam.

For those who have already made your way through the Flashpoint campaign and want another meaty campaign to sink your teeth into, keep your eyes on this one. By the sounds of it it's going to be an excellent (if perhaps a bit too authentic) mod by the time it's released in (hopefully) the not-too-distant future.

Operation: Vietnam

For: Operation: Flashpoint

Version: N/A

URL: www.operation-flashpoint.net/vietnam

Firearms

ONE OF THE MOD SCENE'S OLDEST VETERANS GETS A FACELIFT

Yes, Firearms is another one of those realistic military multiplayer mods. For most of you, that sentence alone is probably enough to make up your mind about whether or not you'll like Firearms. Rest assured, though, that Firearms comes with a lot of features that differentiate it from its better-known cousin, Counter-Strike.

By far one of the more interesting aspects of Firearms is its rank and skill system. As players gain kills they also gain ranks. These ranks in turn translate into skills the player can select which provide them with additional applicable skills on the battlefield. Choose the stealth skill, for instance, and you can move silently and attach silencers to weapons that players without the skill can't.

V2.5RC is actually mainly a stepping-stone to Firearms 2.6, which will make some fairly major changes to the game (including the replacement and



removal of several of the weapons such as the Steyr Aug and dual M111s). If you're sick of CS for now, though, you should definitely give Firearms a try.



Firearms

For: Half - Life

Version: 2.5 (RC)

URL: www.firearmsmod.com

Score: 86%

Vampire Slayer

MOVE OVER BUFFY, HERE'S GORDON FREEMAN

For those wanting something a bit different from your LAN gaming sessions, the Vampire Slayer mod might do the job nicely. Vampire Slayer is a multiplayer-only mod that pits two teams, one consisting of slayers and the other consisting of vampires (well, duh), up against one another in a fight to the death (or undeath, or whatever).

The slayers are able to use firearms such as shotguns or stake-firing crossbows, while the vampires are forced to do it tough and stick to melee attacks, but can detect slayers, move very fast, and drink blood from dead slayers to recover health. They'll also only stay down permanently if you drive a stake into them - the chain

gun cha-cha won't be enough to do the job any more!

Anyone who has played multiplayer Aliens vs Predator will be in familiar territory with this mod, with the slayers being akin to the marines and the vampires being similar to the aliens, except without the confusion of being able to cling to walls and ceilings. This combination can naturally make for some very tense gameplay, with the slayers wanting to stay as far away as possible from the vampires as they sneak about, trying to get close enough to sink their fangs in.

Another interesting feature of Vampire Slayer is that the each side has several different characters, some of who have their own special ability. Father D, for example, prefers a shotgun and can pray with his secondary attack button for temporary immunity. Again, these additions add a whole new aspect to the gameplay; knowing which opponent you're up against is often critical to being able to come out of a fight on top.

Finally, perhaps the biggest new addition to VS (and the real reason behind its Version 2.0 tag) is the inclusion of brand new netcode. While it certainly improves performance over the often-shaky 1.1 code, it does mean that veteran players will need to download the rather chunky full version of the mod rather than a much smaller update file (or at least those of you who've lost your natty PCPP coverdisc will, anyway!). Overall, Vampire Slayer makes a fun diversion for those of you wanting for something a bit different at your next LAN.



Vampire Slayer

For: Half-Life v1.1.0.6 or higher

Version: 2.0

URL: www.planethalflife.com/vampire

Score: 85%

IN DEVELOPMENT

HALF-LIFE GOES TO FEUDAL JAPAN



A lot of the time it seems like there's not a whole lot of difference between mods, with most of them relying on tried and true FPS twitch gameplay. Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course. Still, it's nice to come across something a bit different once in a while, and Bushido fits the bill nicely.

Set in feudal Japan, Bushido is a team-based multiplayer mod that allows players to take on various classes with a range of abilities and weapons, but with a focus on melee combat. Players can choose to be a samurai, shinobi, or one of several other classes. What's more, each of these classes has several ranks that can be attained through gaining experience points through kills, referred to as 'honour'. A shinobi can become a ninja, for instance, and then with enough kills can attain the lofty heights of becoming a geisha assassin.

With the MOD team working on Ninja Half-Life now joining with the Bushido team, it looks like Bushido might be getting close to release. Definitely one to keep an eye on.

Bushido

For: Half-Life

Version: N/A

URL: www.planethalflife.com/bushido

Ultima IX: The Fixes

MAKING BRITANNIA A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE?

Upon its release, Ultima 9 had the dubious distinction of being one of the buggiest games ever released, with only Elite: Frontiers coming close to its level of dodgy workmanship. Given the Ultima series' loyal following, though, it's hardly surprising that someone had the (ahem) bright idea of trying to fix the game.

Thus far, Fans For Ultima have come up with an economy patch (which allows you to buy more useful goods from stores), dialogue patch (which changes the text in the game to give it a story that falls into line with the other Ultimas a little better), and even an unofficial 1.19 patch to improve Direct 3D performance. As to whether it's actually worthwhile, though, well, it's sad to say that it doesn't make much of a difference. There's only so much improvement being able to buy more items from a store can bring with it, after all.



A valiant effort, for certain, but Ultima 9 needs a bit more than this to make it what it could have been. For hardcore Ultima fans only.



Ultima 9: Ascension - The Fixes

For: Ultima 9 v1.18

Version: 1.19

URL: www.fansforultima.com/u9downloads.htm

Score: 45%

Frag-All Rock

KICKING OFF OUR SERIES OF LAN EVENT REPORTS

FRAG-all Rock (FaR) is not an average LAN.

It's not the kind of LAN where you show up, obliterate your friends for ten hours or so and then go home all worn out. FaR is much more like an endurance event which takes place once every three months to sort out the true gaming freaks from the rest of the pretenders.

In terms of organisation, the team does run a relatively tight ship, although there are slip-ups here and there (causing one such organiser to be required to drive the 150km to Sydney the night before the LAN to pick up 1/2 the network.) Even so, the process of running a LAN doesn't have to be particularly regimented. If dinner isn't ready by seven, no one really minds having it at eight.

Food at FaR is always interesting. For the \$35 entry fee all meals are provided which includes the good (A Domino's Pizza Each), the bad (Savings Meat Patties) and the ugly (The pies of DEATH) of all things culinary. The FaR team doesn't claim to possess wonderful kitchen skills, but it would take sheer genius to decipher the difference between a Tomato Meatlovers and a BBQ Meatlovers pizza just by sight. Luckily, nobody seemed to complain about getting the wrong sauce.

Gaming at FaR doesn't seem as paramount as at other LANs, simply because you've got four days to do it. This creates a much more sociable atmosphere in which it's great to sit around and talk or strum a guitar. Gaming is the whole idea of the LAN though, and there was certainly a lot of it going on.

The main talking point of the LAN was centred around one Travis Pocock (aka [UM] Lt. Deathlok). After winning the first two heats of the Great Gaming Decathlon in an absolute canter he went and played a game of football and ended up with a dislocated and broken collar bone. After spending the night in hospital and missing another two rounds of the GGD he then returned to the LAN the following day barely able to move his arm and continued to clean up all comers. Along with coming second in the GGD (by only three frags) he was also a member of the winning CS Clan. This is the stuff legends are made of.

TOURNAMENT WINNERS:

Great Gaming Decathlon: [UM] Maj. Pyro

RUNNERS UP:

[UM] Lt. Deathlok, G!B, Antman
Counter Strike: Undead Mercenaries
Dual Weet-Bix Arena: NIMROD

SPONSORS:

MGL (<http://www.ngl.com.au>) PC Medics (Denison St Hamilton) PC PowerPlay, McDonalds Toronto

FRAG - all Rock III

Location: Toronto NSW

Dates: July 11-14

Players: 60

Cost: TBA

URL: far.astrogamer.com



SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au

FNQGL

Location: Cairns QLD

Date: Bi-Monthly (two day LAN)

Players: 65

Price: \$25

URL: www.fnqgl.com

The Far North Queensland Gaming League has aspirations of being the next Shafted or QGL and seem quite likely to wrest the crown in the far north for some time. Competitions include Quake3, CS and a breath of fresh air known as Tribes 2. There are also openings for other tournaments if people can get enough players together. Their website will keep you up to date on all the upcoming events as well as others in the area.

SouthLAN

Location: O'Conner WA

Dates: Monthly (or so)

Players: 25

Cost: \$15

URL: southlan.axg.net

SouthLAN gets its second mention in this column, mainly because some of the information given last time was incorrect. Thus, we have made corrections which now show that SouthLAN is in fact in Western Australia as opposed to Queensland which should please a lot of LAN starved western gamers. It goes from midday to approximately 4am the next day which is quite a lot of gaming time, not to mention some time for social interaction.

TBA

Location: Maryborough VIC

Dates: TBA

Players: 30

Cost: \$10

URL: themrterminal@hotmail.com

This is a prospective LAN for the people of Maryborough in Victoria. Maryborough is about half way between Bendigo and Ballarat so if you live around this area and are interested in starting a new LAN party feel free to e-mail the address listed. The expected games are fairly standard, with some Starcraft and a bigger focus on UT to spice things up a bit as well. In short, if you'd like a party in this area, please mail the contact address ASAP.

SERIOUS SAM

Start your level building career with this simple two-room tutorial by Anthony Fordham

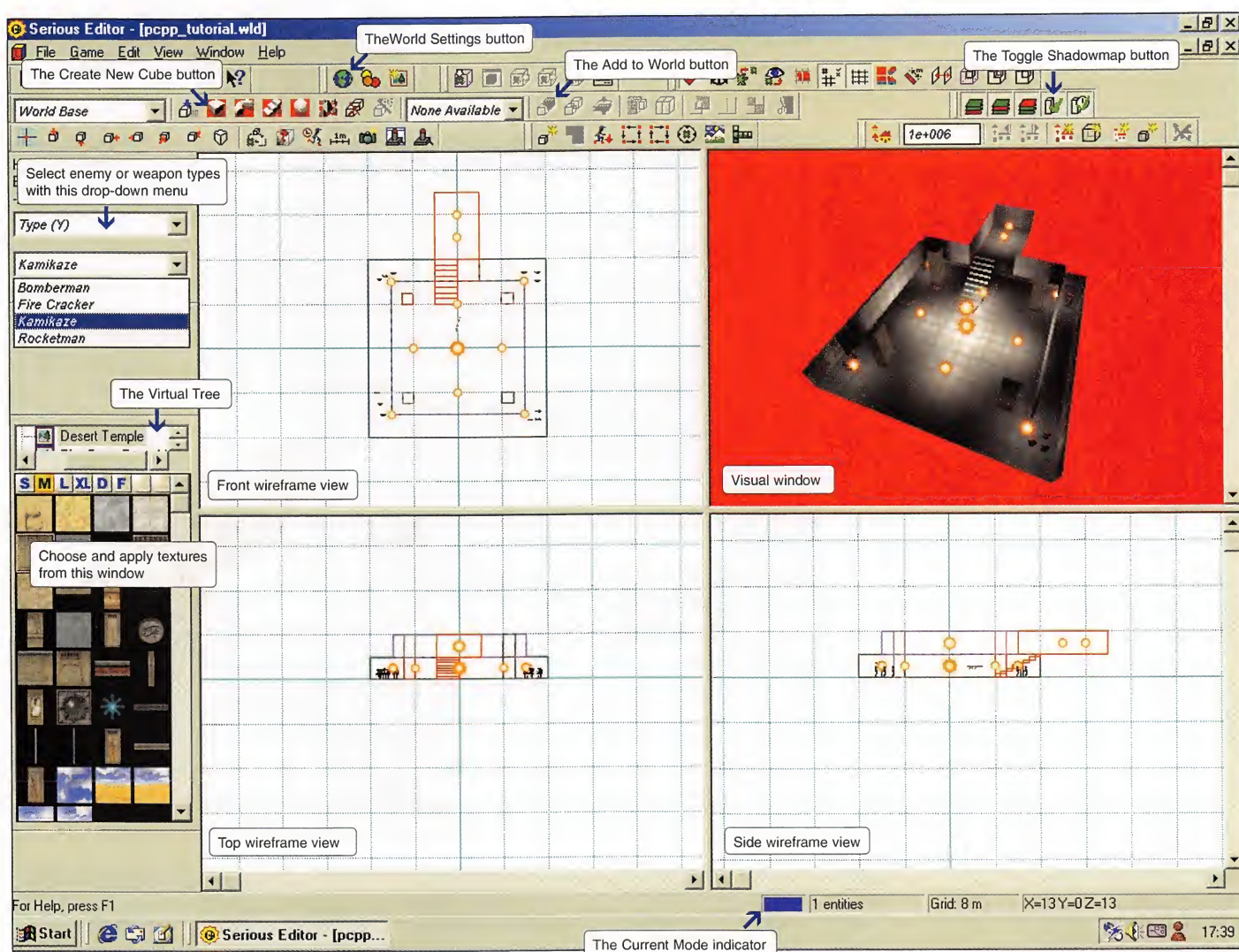
Way back in the last millennium, I cut my teeth on the ugly and unwieldy DEU editor for Doom. It was a graphically-minimalist, confusing mess of a program, riddled with bugs. But with a bit of perseverance and determination I was eventually able to put together quite a neat little Doom episode.

These days of course, our firstperson shooters are in 3D, and level editing at first glance seems infinitely

more complex and difficult. Many of us have struggled with Worldcraft to build new maps for anything running a Quake or Quake2 engine, so it's good to see that Croteam has created a fairly simple and powerful editor that you can use to get a Sam map up and running very quickly.

The Serious Editor does come with a tutorial, but unfortunately it's written in Croteam's best attempts at

English, which to be fair is a lot better than my best attempts at Croatian. However, it's not much use to the beginner. Therefore, the PCPP Modding Krew has put together this tutorial to assist you in creating two rooms linked by a corridor, a bunch of enemies, a double-barrelled coach gun, and a few pretty lights. It won't be very visually impressive, but it will give you a starting point to create more complex worlds.



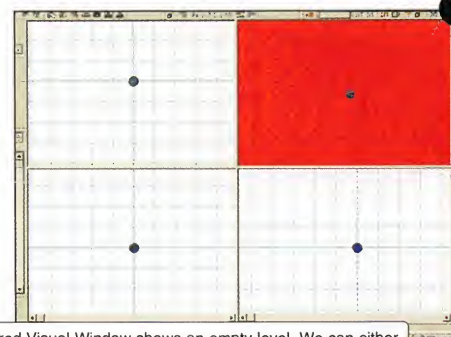
1. UNDERSTANDING CSGS

To be honest with you, I couldn't even be bothered figuring out what CSG even stands for. A CSG can be thought of as a 'potential' object in your level. Imagine you have a cookie cutter representing the potential shape of your cookies. Now imagine you can pull and twist that cookie cutter into any shape you like. This is what a CSG does. A quick note here though: experienced Sam level builders will know that a CSG is in fact much more than this, but for the purposes of clarity and getting folks started, we'll think of a CSG as a

cookie-cutter used to make bits of architecture.

Open the Serious Editor and create a new file from the File menu. Examine our first screenshot (Figure 1) and note the four world views. The view that is red is a visual representation of the level, and it's currently red because the editor is waiting to see what we do next.

This red space is infinite, and represents either endless empty space or endless full space. Which it will actually be depends on what we do next. Because we are about to create a room, the red will be infinite full space from which we will carve out architecture.



The red Visual Window shows an empty level. We can either add (blocks) or subtract (rooms). Today we will subtract.

2. THE FIRST ROOM

Look at the main screenshot of the editor interface to find where the Create Cube button is. The Serious Editor calls this a Conus Primitive, just to be difficult. It's a small white and grey cube on a red background. Click it once.

Examine Figure 2 (bottom of the page). A small dialogue box has appeared in the bottom left of the screen with various settings and options on it. A closer view of this box can be seen in Figure 3. This is the Tool Info box, and it can be called up at any time by pressing Q. Please don't ask me why the shortcut is Q.

You use this box to set the dimensions of your new room. Note that the red squares in the wireframe view and the cubic object in the visual window aren't actually in your level yet. These are the cookie cutters I mentioned earlier. Once you've set your room properties in the way you'd like, you will then add this cookie cutter to the world and it will become real architecture.

For now, the most important field in the Tools Info box is a little checkmark next to the word Room. When this mark is checked, the cookie cutter is hollow and you will carve a room from the infinite filled space of the empty level. The W L and H fields represent the width, height and length of the room. To give you some idea of scale, Sam is very happy walking under a ceiling that is 4 units high.

Set the W L and H properties to 16, 16 and 4 respectively. Nothing will actually happen until you press the enter key – once done, the size of the cookie cutter will change into a large, square room with a low ceiling. If your cookie cutter looks like the outside of a cube rather than a room, make sure the Room checkbox is checked.

3. ADDING THE ROOM

Now click on the Add button. Examine the main screenshot for its location – it's to the right of the New Cube button and looks like a green cube sticking out of a white cube.

Examine Figure 4. The room has turned into a black cube and the empty space around it is red. The room is black because there are no lights in it yet, but we don't have to add lights to see, we just have to turn off the shadow map. Click the No Shadows button, which is all the way to the right of the toolbar (find it on the main screenshot). Your room should reappear.

The room is now part of the level, and you can begin adding objects into it.

4. MOVING AROUND IN THE EDITOR

First things first though, you will need to know how to move around in the editor. Step one **SAVE YOUR LEVEL!** Moving around can really screw up a map, especially if you forget to hold down a vital key. Choose Save from the File menu and the Serious Editor will insist that you save the level in the \serious sam directory where you first installed the game. This is good.

Now on to moving. To move your viewpoint in the Editor, hold down the spacebar and left mouse button

(LMB) and move the mouse. Depending which view you hold the mouse over, you will be able to move the view up, down left and right. Hold down the right mouse button (RMB) and spacebar to zoom in and out. Finally, in the visual window only, hold down both mouse buttons and spacebar to rotate the view. This can be particularly useful when applying textures, as we're about to do.

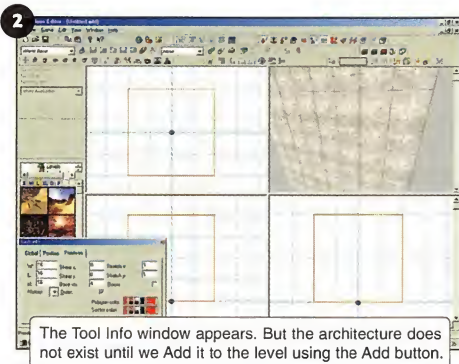
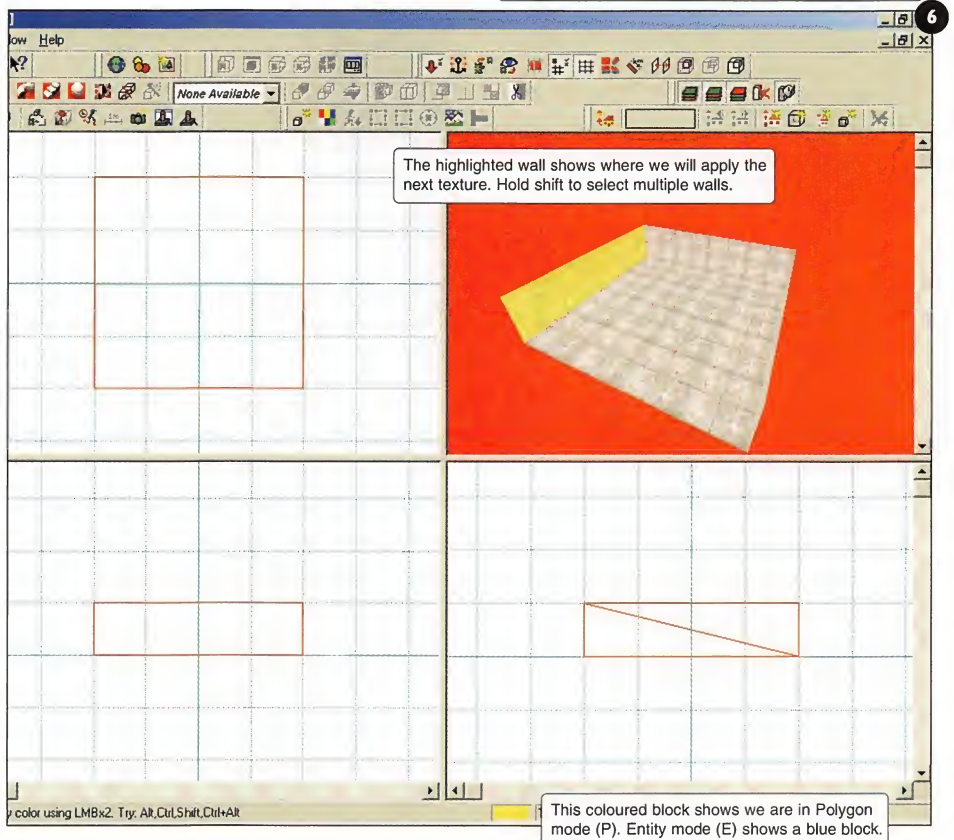
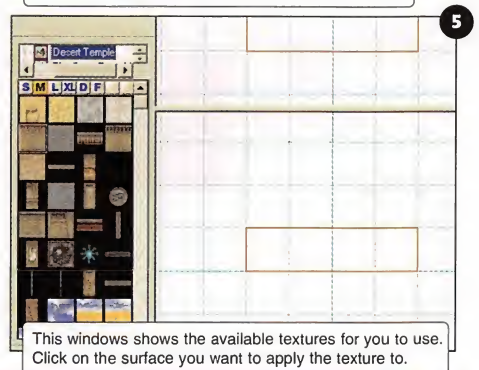
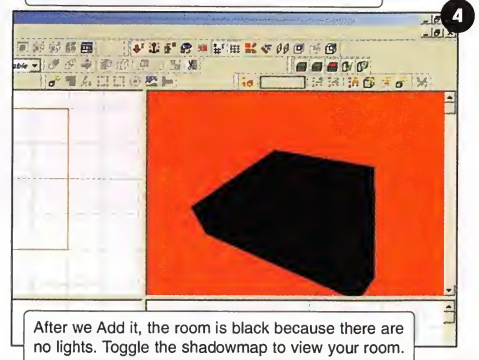
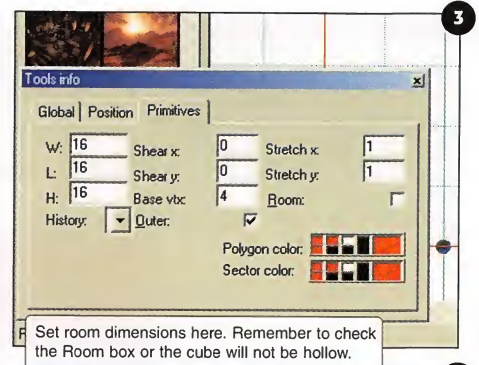
5. APPLYING TEXTURES TO THE ROOM

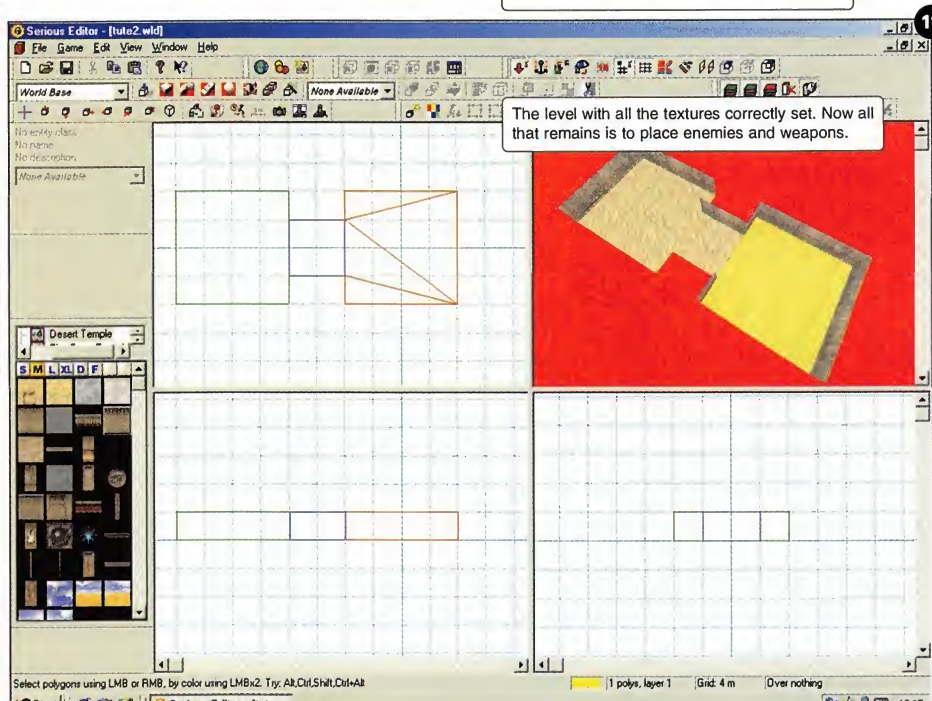
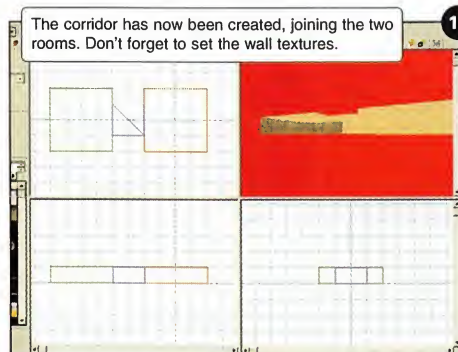
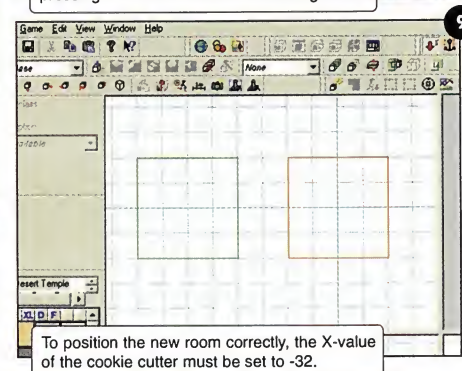
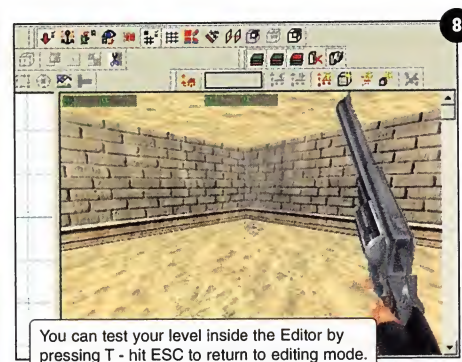
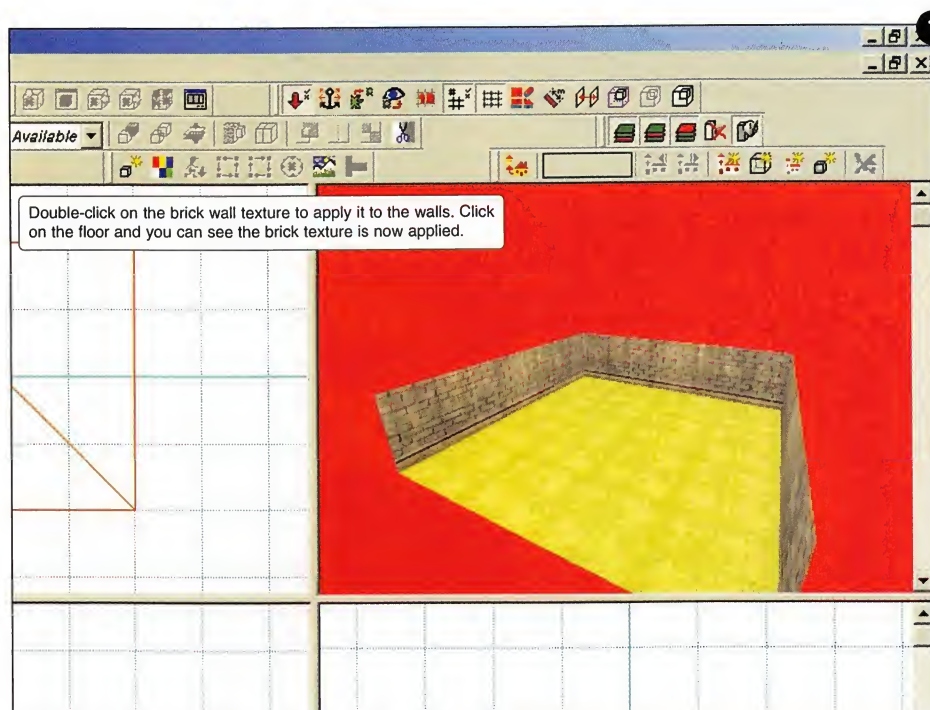
The Serious Editor works in various different modes. The only two modes that really concern us in this tutorial are Polygon mode and Entity mode. In rare moment of sensibleness, the shortcuts for changing between these modes are P and E respectively. In Polygon mode you will be able to change textures on the walls and floor by selecting a surface and then double-clicking a texture in the texture window.

First things first we need to get a list of available textures. Click on the Virtual Tree (see the main screenshot for its location) and select Textures. The tree is really badly designed and can be very fiddly as it keeps snapping back to a single-line view. You'll need to click once on whatever is visible to expand the tree, then click once on the little plus sign next to the word Textures. Then double click on the Desert Temple texture group. The tree will collapse again and a visual list of textures will appear. See Figure 5.

6. SELECTING WALLS TO APPLY TEXTURES

We need to be in Polygon mode to apply textures. Press P and a tiny little coloured window at the bottom of the screen will turn yellow. In the visual window of your level, click on one of the walls. It will turn yellow (Figure 6). Now hold down Shift and click on the next wall. It will turn yellow and the previous wall will remain yellow. This allows us to apply a texture to several walls at once. You will need to spend a bit of time getting the hang of this. Remember – hold spacebar and both mouse buttons to rotate.





7. ACTUALLY APPLYING THE TEXTURE

Now double-click on one of the textures in the texture window to apply a texture to the selected walls. We've chosen the fourth texture on the second row, which is sort of a brick wall. Now in the visual window, click once on the floor of your level. Looking at Figure 7, you can now see the walls have a brick-like texture. We now need to repeat this process for the floor and the ceiling.

The floor should already be selected – if it's not yellow, press P and then click on the floor. Rotate your view to also select the ceiling, remembering to hold down shift to select both the floor and the ceiling at the same time.

We've decided to use a sand texture for both floor and ceiling – it's not particularly realistic, but the desert temple tileset is a bit limited. You might like to use a tiled ceiling texture instead. The sand texture is second from the left on the top row.

8. TESTING THE ROOM

At this point you might like to test your room. Simply press T and the game will run inside the visual window, complete with your preferred controls! You will be able to see your new textures in action, shown here in Figure 8. Press escape to return to editing.

9. BUILDING THE SECOND ROOM.

Now it's time for the second room, which will contain the enemies. We need to zoom out our top view a little, so hold down spacebar and RMB on the top view wireframe (the window in the top left of the four views)

and move the mouse down until you can see the whole of your room and a fair bit of space around it.

Click the Add New Cube button again and the Tool Info will appear once more. But where's the new cookie cutter? All that seems to have happened is that the wireframe of your room has turned from red to green.

The cookie cutter remembers your last settings, so at the moment you are about to create a room that is exactly the same size and position as your first room. We do want the room to be the same size, we just don't want it to be in the same position. Note the Position tab at the top of the Tool Info window. Click it to reveal settings for X Y and Z. Convention puts Z as the vertical up/down axis, but Croteam were never ones to follow fashion – Z in this case refers to the horizontal up/down axis. In the Serious Editor, Y is the vertical axis.

Set X to -32 and press enter. A new green cookie

cutter will appear next to your red room (We're looking at the top view here) as in Figure 9. Click the Add button to add this cookie cutter to your level.

10. THE CORRIDOR

We need to connect the two rooms, so hit the Create New Cube button again. This time, you'll need to change the values for W, for L, and for both X and Z. Set W to 8, L to 8, H to 4, and X to -12. In case you've lost them, the W L and H values are under the Primitives tab. Now Add this corridor to your level. Figure 10 shows what your level should look like now.

11. TEXTURE ADJUSTMENT

You'll need to set the textures for the new room and the corridor as you did with the first room. Remember to hold down Shift to select multiple walls. Figure 11 shows the level so far.

12. ADDING ENEMIES

Now the fun part. We're going to add a whole bunch of Headless Kamikazes into the left-hand room who will all run screaming at you when the level starts, so you can move them down in the corridor. Using the Virtual Tree double click on Enemies. Click and hold on the image of the Kamikaze and drag him into the top view of the left hand room. He will appear in the room, all on his lonesome. Note though that he is not actually a Headless Kamikaze, he's a Firecracker. Above the Virtual Tree is a drop down menu where you can set properties for your enemies and other entities.

If the coloured box at the bottom of the screen isn't blue, hit E to go to entity mode. Now use the drop-down menu to select Type, and choose Kamikaze from the new drop down menu that appears below.

Repeat this process until you have as many enemies as you'd like. We went with 10, for a real massacre. Figure 12 shows the finished product.

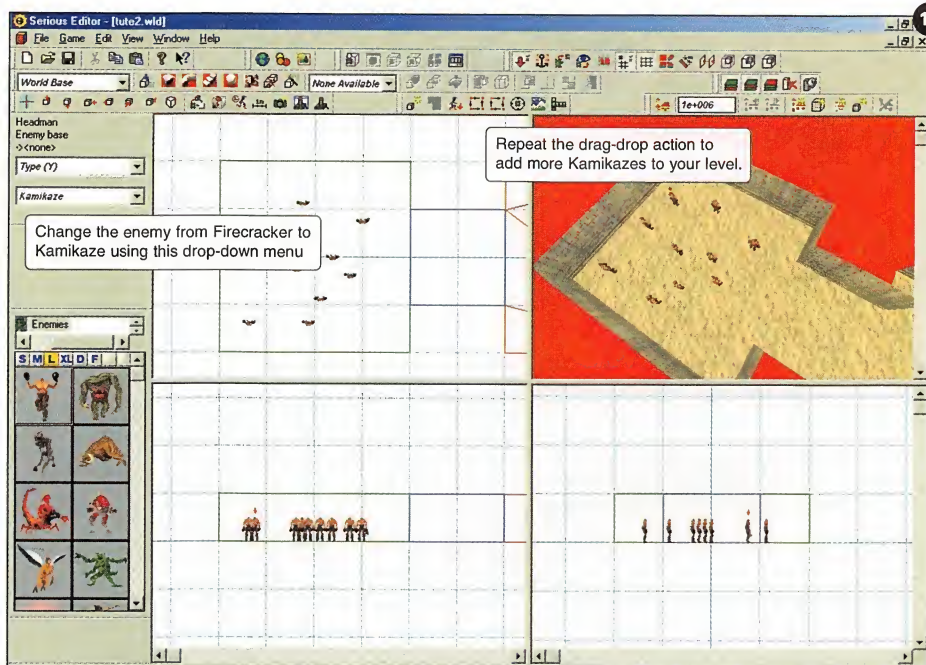
13. ADDING A WEAPON

Adding a weapon for pickup is very similar to adding enemies. Using the Virtual Tree, select Basic Entities, and then choose the little icon of a colt pistol. Drag this icon into the right-hand room, and using the drop-down menu like with the enemies, change the Type to Double Barrelled Shotgun (or whatever you like). Figure 13 shows the result. You can play with other settings for weapons to set how often they respawn, how much ammo they have, and other properties.

12. ADDING LIGHTS

Lighting for Quake and other FPS games was one of the more difficult and time-consuming elements of game creation, as the lightmap for the level would have to be rebuilt before you could play it, which often took upwards of an hour. Fortunately, lights in Sam are simplicity itself.

As you are in the Basic Entities menu after adding your weapon, you can select a light entity (it's a little torch icon) and drag it into the level just like you did the Kamikazes and the shotgun. Unfortunately, the light will appear embedded in the floor, so you need to adjust its Y value using the Tool Info window which you can bring up by pressing Q. Set the



Y value for the light to 2, which will place it in the centre of the room. The X and Z values should both be 0. If for some reason the light is not selected, simply click on it in one of the views, and a red arrow will appear above it.

Because you now have a light, you can turn the shadow map back on by clicking the appropriate button. Now you will see that the room has light, but is still very dark. We need to change the strength of the light.

14. LIGHT BRIGHTNESS

Using the drop down menus like with the weapon, choose the Fall Off property. A green sphere will appear around the light. Change the Float value to 24, which will result in a huge green mess in your wireframe views, but a much brighter room in the visual window.

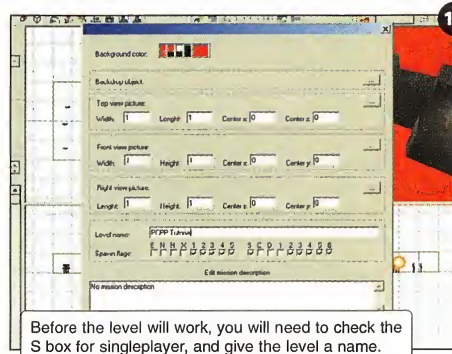
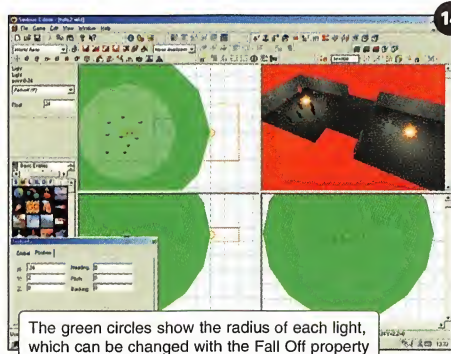
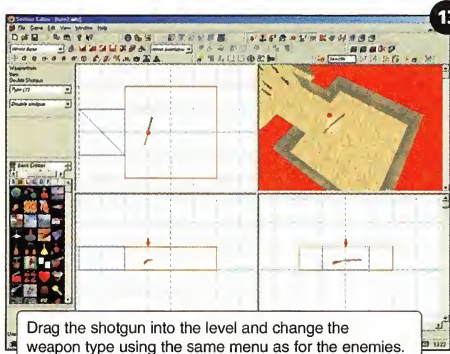
Repeat this whole process to light the second room. The positional values of the second light should be X to -24, Y to 2 and Z to 0. Figure 14 shows the entire level lit.

15. YOU'RE FINISHED!

And that's your first Serious Sam level built! Save it as `pcpp_tutorial.wld` in your Serious Sam directory, follow the instructions in the Running Your Level boxout, and you're away! There is of course plenty more that can be done with the editor, including moving doors, spawning enemies, teleporters and much more. But this simple tutorial has shown you the basics and should get you on the road to some serious level building. Pardon the pun.

16. NEARLY FORGOT!

There is one final thing you need to do before your level will run. Click on the World Settings button (it's a little globe) and a very nasty looking dialogue box will appear, as in Figure 15. Make sure you check the little box marked S for Singleplayer, and give the level a name. NOW you're ready to go.



RUNNING YOUR LEVEL

Now everything is finished, it's time to give it a play, and not just in the tiny quarter-screen test area. This is where Croteam was definitely negligent: how the hell do I get into my level? When the level was saved, the Serious Editor put it in the root `serious sam` directory (or wherever you installed the game). First, open Notepad but don't write anything. Save the empty file USING THE SAME NAME AS YOUR LEVEL, but select **all files** in file type and change the file extension in the filename box to `.vis`. Now save this `.vis` file in the `serious sam\levels` directory. Now copy your `.wld` file (your level's save file) from the root `serious sam` directory into this same `\levels` directory. Assuming you followed this tutorial to the letter, you should have two files in the `\levels` directory called `pcpp_tutorial.wld` and `pcpp_tutorial.vis`. Now start the game, choose Singleplayer, choose Custom Map, and your new level should be listed. Happy fragging!



Black & White

DEVELOPER	LIONHEAD STUDIOS
LOCATION	GUILDFORD SURREY, UK
DEVELOPMENT TIME	A LITTLE OVER 3 YEARS
PEDIGREE	POPULOUS, THEME PARK, DUNGEON KEEPER
RELEASED	MARCH 2001



Peter Molyneux is one of those names that inspire awe in gamers as one of the brightest lights in the games industry, with an amazing ability to bring his dreams to life.

When he started waving his arms around and claimed to be making the greatest game of all time many people expected an AI more real than your best friend and a world more beautiful, interactive and responsive than the one outside the window beside your PC. Timothy C. Best quizzed Molyneux over the success of his pet project...

Timothy C. Best: What I liked was that so much of the pie-in-the-sky dream made it into the game.

Peter Molyneux: The funny thing is you always have this dream at the start and it is always diluted by the end - it is never quite perfect. We've set up another whole company, called Black & White Studios, and all it will be doing is making new things for Black & White. My absolute hope is that one-day it will be perfect. We wanted people to believe the Creature's AI was a real AI, a real intelligent thing working and that will be the case. It may take a few more patches to be the case but it will definitely be the case. And the interface isn't perfect and there will be a few changes making it better for people currently using it and make it easier for people to pick it up.

TCB: What parts of the game caught the dream best?

PM: I think in a way it was the feedback to the player. The world changing was pretty good and the creature, although the intelligence still has a way to go, is something that we feel really, really proud of here. The combination of art, animation and programming does seem to bring them alive. People do seem to get upset

when he gets hurt and I have had irate phone calls from people saying "how could you take him away from me?" When you have that, you know that you are on the right sort of track.

TCB: What were the clay feet of the game?

PM: It was definitely the beginning. Without any doubt. The trouble with the beginning is that although it looks simple it's actually insanely complicated. We had to both hold your hand and let you free at the same time and it went through an awful lot of iterations and a lot of changes.

If I had my time again I would extend the first hour into more like two hours and then focus the player on getting used to controlling things and getting him to used to moving around the world through a series of challenges, which I'd make as compulsive as possible. Double-clicking to go somewhere really far was only covered once in the whole of the game, for example, and quite a lot of people don't use it and it is definitely the easiest, fastest, nicest way to navigate around. I think we could have done a lot more there but we had to call a stop to the game, we were so exhausted we were almost dying right there on the spot. It would have taken three months to do the opening sequence again and I really regret, in a way, not doing that.

TCB: My friend and I have tried cancelling spells in games like Baldur's Gate by shaking the mouse and we've found ourselves wondering why click and dragging doesn't scroll web pages...

PM: Really? I'm really happy with the interface once you get used to it but think where we didn't go far enough at all was the feedback with what you were doing



especially in the first hour of play. I think it could have been an awful lot better and I think people have probably gotten frustrated, but I think once you get into it, into gesturing and shaking things out of your hand and picking things up and dropping things it's really, really nice. And there are times when it does get in the way but when you think of the amount of stuff you can do with it... I'm pretty pleased with it really.

TCB: With the media hype surrounding Black & White it seemed that people expected something that not only was a game but would cure world hunger. Do you regret lighting the fire so brightly?

PM: Some people have turned around to me and said, "you are brilliant at PR," and that's rubbish. I'm not. All I'm doing is what I do in the office: I just get very enthusiastic about the idea and I sell the idea that I have in my head. That's all I do and sometimes the end result doesn't match up and sometimes it does.

The weird thing about Black & White is that all of the PR that was out there, all of the talk on the 'net was based on what Cathy [Campas, Lionhead's PR person] and I do. It took a life of its own, it became this all self-fulfilling thing in that all these fan sites started popping up and there was this huge deluge of information.

A newspaper here has these regular statistics on what people are looking for on the 'net and at one time Black & White was the sixth most requested piece of information on the 'net in the whole world. And that is just terrifying. If you could imagine that you are sitting in here with 20 people and there is this vast amount of information out there with people speculating what this game is like and people actually, every sentence said was actually analysed and built up with importance and whenever I



get into an interview or do a demo I don't think these things out or strategise them I just wave my arms about, so in some ways it's incredibly amazing that happens and in others it's quite scary.

There was one point about a year ago where we were talking about an idea, which was eventually rejected, where you could actually make a creature out of any living thing, potentially any living thing you saw could become one of your creatures. Suddenly on the 'net people were theorising that trees could become creatures and fruit that came off trees could become creatures because they were living. It was taking it to the nth degree how the world could change because of the one simple thing I said. To that degree the hype was just enormous about the game.

But, I wouldn't really change a thing. It was amazing to see the ideas that people had for the game.

TCB: After all the arm waving are there some parts of the game that make you cringe when you talk to people?

PM: Oh yeah, absolutely. I'd say whenever I talk to somebody about the game I normally end up saying sorry and that's simply because I can make all the excuses and that we were tired and that we did work incredibly... I mean it was impossible for any human being to work harder than we worked and we spent all our own money... we didn't spend any of our publisher's money, but those are just excuses; at the end of the day, you know, I went out there and waved my arms around and said that this was the greatest game ever and when people get it and it isn't their cup of tea you have to apologise for it.

TCB: Black & White has received such intense scrutiny.

What lessons will you take away from it?

PM: One of the biggest lessons was, without any doubt at all, that how well a story is written, how compulsive it is, is just incredibly important. I'd never been involved in a story-based game before, they had always been level-based games, and I was very, very, very naive with the story side. I thought it would take a couple of months and it turned out taking well over a year to put it in. There is one of the big lessons right there: you can write down a story on the back of a piece of paper and it will seem like a story written on the back of a piece of paper - and the story, and what makes it compulsive and attractive to people, needs to be as carefully crafted as any piece of AI or 3D engine or physics engine and that is a big, big lesson.

That and the fact that there is no excuse for making your game inaccessible, there is no excuse for making it really hard at the start and not allowing people to get straight into the game and feel absolutely comfortable. There is no excuse for the hour of frustration people had at the start of Black & White.

Even summing up the faults and lessons learnt from Black & White, even after devoting more than three years of his life to it, talking to Molyneux you can feel the excitement in his voice, and you can sense the vision of this sweeping game experience just behind his eyes. Although he has promised the Lionhead crew that there will be no arm waving for the next big thing for at least a year, doubt not that when the time is right, the Molyneux Circus will start all over again when he walks into a hushed demo room, packed with lucky journo's, and the arms start to move and the voice is raised to sing about the next greatest game ever...

ON SECOND THOUGHTS

My initial motive in writing the review of Black & White was to dispel at least some of the massive hype that had been generated around the game and take a more impartial look at the title. I was initially very disappointed with the way the player was introduced to the world of Black & White and the way the control system was handled.

Persistence has shown that the game has quite a versatile and powerful control system; it's just explained very poorly. The importance of setting waypoints wasn't stressed in either the manual or the tutorial, and the double-click method of movement should have been a key concept but instead was treated as a shortcut 'power tip' for extra-keen players.

I also commented that it was easier being good than being evil. Experience with the game has now shown that it is relatively easy to be what the game thinks of as evil - in fact sometimes the player will end up evil through no conscious fault of their own. I still strongly believe that the alignment system in the game has no real practical effect on the player - a bat spell has exactly the same effect as a dove spell. The way you go about things may be slightly different, but the end result is always more belief. Finally though, the story of Black & White remains appallingly simplistic and its implementation is rudimentary at best. While some of the silver-scroll quests are entertaining, the main plotline is the barest sketch of a story, goes nowhere, and offers very little that is rewarding.

My score for Black & White stands; this is something new and by and large the game has been done well. But it's nowhere near the greatest game of all time.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP#60

"Not the greatest game ever, but still great"

92

ACTION REPLAY

DEUS EX

CLEANING UP HELL'S KITCHEN

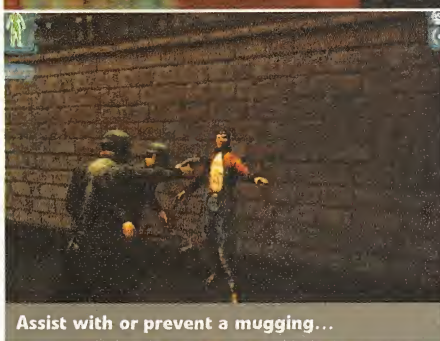
Compiling last month's Top 100 feature prompted us to dive into *Deus Ex* once more just to reaffirm that it is indeed the greatest game ever made. We enjoyed ourselves so much it seemed appropriate to renew our now regular Action Replay with an appreciation of Ion Storm's magnum opus.

If Warren Spector is to be believed, *Deus Ex* is not only all about player choice, but the meaningful consequences of those choices. And, wouldn't you know it, he's absolutely correct. *Deus Ex* doesn't tell a non-linear story - ie. a branching narrative of boolean alternatives - but offers the player the freedom to express himself and overcome obstacles in a manner of his own devising. Nowhere is this design ethos more clearly evident than in the player's first trip to Hell's Kitchen, New York, several missions into the game.

The primary objective in Hell's Kitchen is to shutdown a power generator in a nearby warehouse occupied by the NSF, an anti-globalisation terrorist group. It's perfectly possible for the player to simply find the warehouse, subdue the NSF resistance, and destroy the generator, thus completing the objective in lean and efficient fashion. The fact that this kind of straightforward approach is achievable only highlights the success of Ion Storm's original vision for the game.

But the inquisitive player will discover so much more to do, including at least four substantial subquests and a host of other incidents with which you can become involved. Completing a subquest provides a slightly easier route to fulfilling the main objective in the form of better intelligence or useful equipment. Meanwhile, the other incidents serve to deepen the world fiction and lend moral context to each subsequent situation. And of course the primary objective itself can be accomplished through a multitude of subtly different actions.

The greatness of *Deus Ex* can be measured by the way it subverts the concept behind the title. There is no *deus ex machina*, no hand of God. The hand of the designer remains invisible at all times; the hand of the player himself is instrumental in determining the experience to be had. Genius.



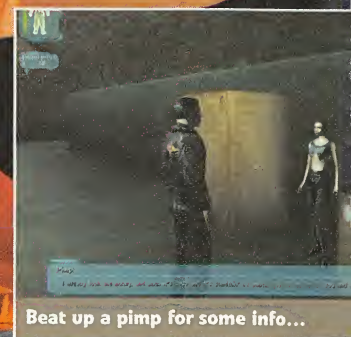
Assist with or prevent a mugging...



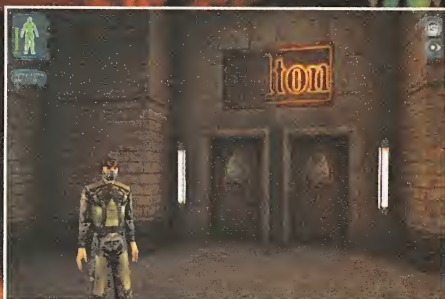
Then shoot some hoops before...



Get some hustling in...



Beat up a pimp for some info...



Cleaning up a hostage situation and...



Joining a shoot-out in the streets...



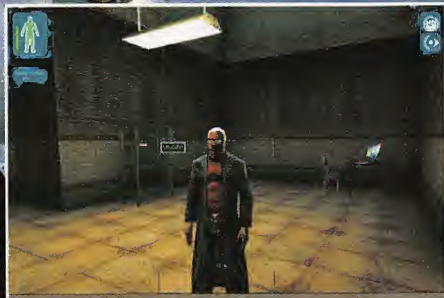
Eavesdrop on a drug deal...



Witness the effect of Zyme at the Free Clinic...



Visit your brother's hotel room to stock up...



Finally, drop by Smuggler's hideout. Phew!

HALL OF FAME

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GREATEST GAMES ON THE PLANET, CONVENIENTLY DIVIDED INTO RESPECTIVE GENRES. PERUSE THE PICK OF CURRENT TITLES, WHEN THEY WERE REVIEWED AND THEIR SCORE. THE LATEST GOLD AWARDS ARE LISTED TOO, SO YOU CAN BE UP ON THE ABSOLUTE LATEST. ANY GAMES YOU'VE MISSED ARE A BLIGHT ON YOUR REPUTATION PICK THEM UP AND FIND WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR LIFE. PLAY IT LOUD, PLAY IT PROUD.

STRATEGY



Age of Empires 2: Age of Kings 94% . #42
Perfectly balanced affair with numerous races on the grand scale.



Black & White 92% . #60
Conquer the world with belief by controlling villagers and a giant beast.



Hostile Waters 91% . #61
Combines FPS action with all kinds of strategy. Deploy and control units from a carrier.



Homeworld 95% . #41
Realtime mission-based epic boasts greatest camera and most beautiful 3D space ever.

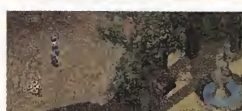


Sacrifice 90% . #55
Magic-based realtime combat strategy with one wizard and enormous maps.

ROLEPLAYING



Planescape: Torment 91% . #46
Characters and combat used perfectly in a dense, emotive world. The greatest story ever.



Baldur's Gate II 93% . #53
Classes, skills, artifacts and extended gameplay in purest Dungeons & Dragons adventure.



Diablo 2: LOD 90% . #63
Hack'n'slash at its very finest. This add-on adds on a hell of a lot on to this hellish game, and we love it!



Arcanum 92% . #64
Genuine roleplaying and deep interaction set in a superbly inventive world. Plenty of replay value, too.



Everquest 90% . #39
High fantasy and hi-tech meet in this stunning online extravaganza.

RACING



F1 Racing Championship 90% . #60
The best looking and fastest of its kind. The Ferrari of Formula One sims.



Grand Prix Legends 95% . #30
The old standard that gave new meaning to historical accuracy - and a real challenge!



Colin McRae 2 85% . #57
Superior physics, high realism and lean design. Just the rally essentials.



GP 500 96% . #43
Motorcycle Championship game in its own league. Superb racing in its own right.



Grand Prix 3 88% . #53
Third instalment of the classic F1 series with amazing AI, weather and authenticity.

ACTION



Deus Ex 98% . #51
The most complete games experience ever: FPS, RPG, whatever you wish.



Thief: The Dark Project 95% . #33
Pioneered stealth as the new way to kill and tension as the new adrenalin.



System Shock 2 98% . #42
Genre bending shocker where computers are mad and techno-fear is alive & well.



Half-Life 98% . #31
New school FPS with awesome weapons, chilling script and great pacing.



Operation Flashpoint 94% . #64
Incredibly atmospheric and unbearably tense, this is truly the ultimate soldier simulation. Brilliant mix of action and tactics.

READER'S TOP FIVE

My favorite gaming moment would have to be the many, many hours I spent logged on battle.net for Diablo. Those were some of the best hours of my gaming life. Sitting down for a quick go after dinner, and the next thing I know, the sun is coming up, and my parents are yelling at me about school in a couple of hours. Now that was fun :)

Mr Waffle

Send your Top Five games of all-time to:
imho@pcpowerplay.com.au
Don't forget to tell us why!



1. TIE Fighter

2. Diablo

3. Red Alert

4. Baldur's Gate

5. Fallout 2



RECENT GOLD AWARDS



Arcanum
92% PCPP#64



Operation
Flashpoint
94% PCPP#64



Diablo 2: LoD
90% . #63



Worms:
World Party
90% . #62



Hostile Waters
91% . #61



Summoner
90% . #61



SPORT



Tony Hawk 2
92% . #58
Perfect blend of challenge, control and excitement in this X-large sports classic.



Links 2001
82% . #57
The finest example of PC golf on the planet.



FIFA 2001
84% . #57
The closest to football reality with a bigger pitch, best defense and nicest special moves.



NBA Live 2001
81% . #60
Backboard mayhem in the finest b-ball game to date.



Madden 2001
78% . #56
American football with the perfect engine and all prettied up.

MANAGEMENT



The Sims
90% . #47
People simulation phenomenon offers complete domestic control.



RollerCoaster Tycoon
93% . #36
Maintain theme parks while building coasters, thrill rides and toilets



SimCity 3K
90% . #35
Finest in the classic series, guide your city from settlement to metropolis



Zeus
91% . #58
Reign in terror or glory over your little Greek worshippers



Championship Manager 00/01
90% . #57
Authentic soccer mayhem from the sidelines

FLIGHT SIM



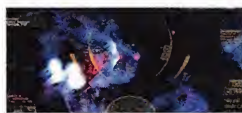
Mig Alley
92% . #42
Great mix of strategy, first class planning and a superb flight model.



I-War 2
85% . #63
Sequel of the highest quality that sets new standards for space sims



Falcon 4
98% . #33
Aerial thrills, high realism, the ageing master of flight.



Freespace 2
95% . #44
Gorgeous visuals, stunning story, superb space battle action.



Jane's FA /18
91% . #37
High class, accessible, realistic top quality flight sim is the business

ONLINE



Tribes 2
93% . #60
The finest cooperative combat experience in the firstperson



Counter-Strike
91% . #55
Half Life and team-based battle are the quintessential online experience



Quake 3
93% . #45
Sickest, simplest, most user-friendly deathmatch experience bar none

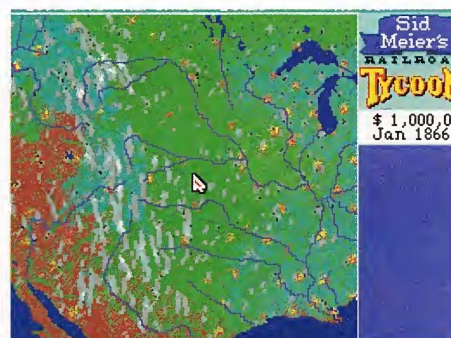


Unreal Tournament
94% . #45
Options and modes of play mean UT offers the goods for online deathmatch variety



Worms: World Party
90% . #62
Premiere online puzzle strategy game. Command tiny worms with giant weapons

RAILROAD TYCOON



Long before Alpha Centauri, long before Firaxis, long before any of these things, there was a man. This man built strategy games. Not just any strategy games either, these were good solid, time wasters. One year before Civilization, the strategy classic that changed the face of gaming, Mr Sid Meier changed the image of trains forever. In 1990, Microprose published Railroad Tycoon.

The train premise wasn't merely a convenient front for a commercial simulation but a fairly integral part of the experience. Train buffs aren't generally catered for in our increasing mainstream industry (Microsoft's Train Sim is a recent exception) but all the stops were out and the organ was blaring in this Fat Controller's dream. It must be said that the game was basically a management game but its successful blend of trains (and tracks and such), competition, and commerce in a shifting economic climate made Railroad Tycoon a favourite of any serious gamer.

In a time when multiplayer strategy gaming was reserved to Risk and other board games, the fledgling transport mogul was forced to play alone against computer AI opponents. Railroad

Tycoon offered a serious challenge if played with some competitive spirit, by say allowing your competitors to build an empire and then trying to outdo them. But the computer cheated (as they always do), by making routes over incredible terrain and multiple entrances to cities, so that was frustrating. Those who lacked any sense of fairness took solitude in a tactic that promised ridiculous profits and assured the Presidency. These clever-pants bought out significant shares of their opponents at the beginning of the game on credit, only to make a killing when the share prices rose. Such is commerce, I guess. The experts of Railroad Tycoon are no doubt Wall Street scrooges now. Thank you, Mr Meier, you made their millions.



REVIEWS

X-Wing vs TIE Fighter (93%)
Need for Speed 2 (90%)
The Last Express (88%)

THE ARCHIVE

FIVE YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S
AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

PCPP#13 JUNE 1997

As we peer into the distant past of four long years ago, we see an industry on the verge of massive change: PC games are entering a new era of 3D entertainment, pesky consoles are a threat to our very way of life and Duke Nukem Forever is just around the corner. So nothing's changed in four years. Well, that's not quite true. When we say new era of 3D entertainment, I mean 3Dfx cards on PIs. Those pesky consoles in question are such dinosaurs as the Sega Saturn, N64, PlayStation and the 3DO. As for the Duke: "3D Realms have announced Duke Nukem Forever will make use of the Quake engine, so that it will be in true 3D." And it was expected some time in 1998. We can all have a chuckle at that one. Previews of classics yet to appear include Fallout, which looked decidedly stunning back then, Dark Forces 2: Jedi Knight, which didn't have any screenshots yet and Carmageddon, which wouldn't create a media frenzy for some time. Also the interactive movie was alive and well. By that, we mean there were still some poor sods producing them. Anyone remember A Fork in the Tale? Us neither. In other news, the MPEG 3 format had emerged as a major threat to national security. Well record companies, at least.

"We have our own way of advancing technology and believe this is a better option via software rather than hardware"
Andrew Spencer, Creator of Ecstatica and Ecstatica II (86% PCPP#12) and nothing since.

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Hot Hardware

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Why Emagen?

Emagen systems are designed to bring your games to life, with awesome graphics and sound systems, together with fast hard drives so your games load quickly.

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cd powerplay



HARRY'S INTRO

Games require Direct X8 to run properly. Movies will only work if you have the right movie players installed on your PC. The ones you will need to view the movies include Windows Media Player 7.1, DivX Player and Quicktime 4. In case you don't have them, we've included the latest versions of each file on the CD.

About the Patches And Mods - These files modify your existing game files. Make sure to follow the included instructions when using these files just to be safe.

cdtech@pcpowerplay.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it (no postage required), together with a description of the error, to:

PC PowerPlay CD Returns

Reply Paid 634, 78 Renwick St

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DEMOS CD 1

BATTLECRUISER 3000AD

This is the full version of Derek Smart's epic space simulation. After years in development, Battlecruiser 3000AD is the only space flight sim that gives you everything you expect in the genre and more. The spiritual successor to Elite.

Controls

yaw - left, right arrows
pitch - up, down arrows
roll left - insert
roll right - delete
thrust factor setting - 0-9
increase/decrease thrust - +, -
afterburner - /
hyperjump - shift+9
weapons system on/off - w
weapons selection menu - shift+w
radar target mask - shift+m
electro magnetic disruptor jammer on/off - e
cloaking system on/off - shift+c
passive target acquisition on/off - p
fire main laser - enter
fire missile - spacebar
cycle missiles and mines - backspace

Vertical jump - Backspace
Back flip - Backspace (twice)
Centre on current worm - C
Switch to next worm - TAB

ANDROMEDA 9

This is a multiplayer only space-sim. Control an armed ship and fly around the regions of space and all their elements. Battle others in game modes like deathmatch, CTF, and domination.

Controls

Up - Up arrow
Left - Left arrow
Right - Right arrow
Light fire - Right Ctrl
Heavy fire - Right Shift
Global Chat - c
Team Chat - t
Radar on/off - F5
Stats on/off - F6

ULTIMA 1 - A LEGEND IS REBORN

This is a very cool tech demo of the non profit 3D accelerated version of the popular classic title, Ultima. However, being only a tech demo, the final release is far from finished.

Controls

Arrow keys moves around, left mouse button clicks an item in the game world.
Pressing right mouse button will also move in the direction you are facing. ESC quits the program.

3D WORLD WAR II

In 3D WWII, the player takes on the role of Jack Crusher, a special operations USA officer with a special assignment - destroy top Third Reich officers and stop the war.

HOTWIRED

Begin a new digital profession as a car thief in Hotwired. Under the shroud of nightfall, you must steal specific cars and return with them to the harbour as fast as you

can elude the cops.

Controls

Up - Accelerate
Down - Decelerate
Left - Steer Left
Right - Steer Right
Ctrl - use button

MOON TYCOON

This is a city simulation/strategy game featuring camera freedom and nice surround sound. Create colonies in 3D environments and trade with Earth and alien races alike.

Controls

All controls via keyboard



WORMS WORLD PARTY

This is the great game of Worms with a bit of world domination thrown in. Climb to the top as you compete in various battles to achieve worms world supremacy!

Controls

View/Scroll landscape - mouse movement
Select weapons/targets - left mouse button
Open/cancel menu - right mouse button
Move left - Left arrow
Move right - Right arrow
Aim up - Up arrow
Aim down - Down arrow
Jump - Enter
Back jump - Enter (twice)

GAMEPLAYCD1

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER SOURCE CODE

This is the source code for the great action title, No One Lives Forever, by Monolith Productions.

OFFICIAL S.W.A.T. V1.2

This modification includes eight new uniforms (four using modded character models), new splash screen, and many new primary and secondary weapons, all with new detailed models.

SERIOUS SAM SDK

This package contains the header files and libs to link with the engine and game, debug version of game/tools useful for debugging your mods more easier, and autogenerated headers for model files.

BLACK & WHITE MAP PACK

This is a fantastic unofficial map pack of six levels for the great strategy title by Lionhead.

STARTOPIA MISSION EDITOR

This is the first StarTopia mission editor ever! This lets you create your own missions for this great management title.

VAMPIRE SKIN PACK

A collection of skins created and used by members of The Masquerade Project.

VAMPIRE SLAYER V2.0

Here is the most recent to this cool mod for Half-Life. Packed with fixes and some great additions including maps, this mod is great for some serious slaying.

COUNTER-STRIKE V1.2 RETAIL PATCH

The file will update the retail version only of Half-Life: Counter-Strike from a fresh install to v1.2.

COUNTER-STRIKE TACTICAL PACK

This is a great pack modification for this popular Half-Life mod, Counter-Strike.

THE OPERA: RELEASE 1.0

This is a fantastic Half-Life mod in likeness to the Hong Kong Blood Opera style movies. With John Woo-style gameplay, fast action and memorable movements that will save your life, this is a duel, not a simple fragfest.

THEY HUNGER: EPISODE 3

This add-on include the first three episodes of the They Hunger horror singleplayer levels. It's one of the best add-on packs around.

SV INSTA GIB 1.0

In this mod you have only one weapon, the gauss. Insta Gib means one shot one kill, so you have to act fast and intelligent!

DEMOS CD 2

ANACHRONOX

Join Sylvester "Sly" Boots and Stiletto as they trek across the galaxy and the three dimensions, looking for both a long-dead alien race with the secrets of advanced technology, and the mysterious forces bent on crushing our universe out of existence!

Controls

Move Forward - W
Move Left - A
Move Right - D
Back - S
World Skill - Control
Last Item - L
World Select - Spacebar

CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS

Realtime strategy game set in space. Manage resources, explore up to 16 different systems, set up supply lines, oversee scientific research, form alliances, and more, all in an attempt to crush your enemies.

Controls

All controls via the mouse

ICEWIND DALE - TRIALS OF THE LUREMASTER

An all new, free mini-expansion for Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter, featuring new areas, new quests, new challenges, new character portraits, monsters, and more.

Controls

All controls via the mouse

ULTIMATE RIDE

This is a great game where you create the ultimate theme park ride and then hop in yourself to see what your twisted imagination has created.

Controls

Spacebar - start ride
1 - firstperson
2 - tether
3 - cinematic

COLOBOT

This is a realtime strategy title where you're head of a space expedition and are assisted by some robots only. You must successfully explore and colonise various planets.

Controls

All controls via the mouse

GAMEPLAYCD2

REAL TOURNAMENT

Real Tournament: Clan Wars is a team based add-on to Unreal Tournament, focusing on clan or persistent group loyalties in both singleplayer and online competition.

TACTICAL OPS V2.0

Tactical Ops is a realistic multiplayer teamplay mod for Unreal Tournament. The game is based around two teams, the elite Tactical Ops team of the American police force and terrorists from around the world.

THE RED PILL

The latest creation from Bubba's Arena for Q3 Arena. A graphics tech demo for high end systems that sports a boatload of new models and visual effects. See just how deep the rabbit hole is.

EXPERT QUAKE III BETA 1.0

Expert Quake puts you and all other players on even ground, with straight gladiator style gameplay where no one has the upperhand. No Quad or Power Armor here. It's just you, your weapons, and your skills.

EXPERT QUAKE III MAPS

This is the pack of recommended maps that you should use while playing this first public release of Expert Quake III.

GEFORCE TWEAK UTILITY 3.0.4

This is a great utility to tweak your GeForce card to the max. This utility allows you make a lot of modifications to the registry settings of your Geforce videocard. All registry mods work.

ALLIANCE CTF

Alliance is a Capture The Flag deathmatch modification for Quake III Arena. Its most identifiable feature is the offhanded grappling hook which allows players to grapple and shoot their weapons at the same time.





V8 TEST-TUBE CHALLENGE

THE FIRST EVER ALL-AUSTRALIAN GENETICALLY ENGINEERED ANIMAL RACING GAME

■ The boots and I would like to apologise for the lack, in recent months, of in-depth interviews and profiles on up and coming Australian developers and their weird-arse games. This was due to, among many other things, the heel coming off the left boot and me falling down the stairs into my basement flat. In that order. Anyway, I'm out of hospital and the boots are back from the cobblers, and no sooner had we come in to the office for a durry with the Hyper boys than the so-called 'real life' staffers of PCPP had thrust a Countrylink ticket into my hand and pointed me in the general direction of Bathurst, NSW.

After a picturesque Maccas lunch at Lithgow and a somewhat lurching bus ride past the Wellarawang power station, I arrive at the offices of ZyCam Interactive, above Joe's Garage, Bathurst's only nightclub.

"It stands for Zygote Camshaft," explains lead designer Brad Wrinklestick, "because here today you are going to get to play the first ever all-Australian genetically engineered animal racing game."

"We've been sniffing the winds of change," adds programmer Bobby Mulletplug, "and we strongly believe that the future of racing games here in Australia is one of turbo charged mutant animals hurling themselves around great tracks, like Bathurst's own Mount Pan."

When asked where ZyCam gets their ideas, Wrinklestick replies, "From petrol and solvents mostly, although I've recommended to Bobby here that he lays off on some of the heavier benzenes and aromatics."

"Wheeze," says Bobby, vigorously shaking up a can of Armorol.

I ask them what the deal is with the game.

"The deal with the game man," cries Wrinklestick, "the deal with the game is that we use a cutting-edge 3D graphics engine to create a virtual lab, right, a virtual lab where you can create wild and whacky

animals, like put an animal together from other parts of animals until you have this new animal."

"Like the upcoming Sigma," I reply.

"NOTHING like Sigma at all man," says Wrinklestick, "completely different concept. You're in a virtual lab, and you get bits of animals to make new animals. Like you might take the head of a lion and the body of maybe an ostrich and then you'd put them together with the wings of a turtledove and the spines of a porcupine..."

"And then you shove a V8 up its arse!" exclaims Mulletplug.

"That's right," Wrinklestick agrees, "or you could get the feet and bill of a duck and the body of, maybe, a beaver."

"Like a platypus," I say.

It's at this point that we move on to discuss the racing engine.

"Check it out," says Wrinklestick, firing up a heavily modded AMD 1.3GHz, "this is like a totally accurate simulation of Mount Panorama, and this is my Wildebeest/Goldfish Twin Cam Turbo V8, check out the lighting effects. Yeah, and then I sort of just..."

The odd looking creature beings to crawl around the track on yellow flippers while the enormous engine roars. Smoke begins to pour from the unfortunate thing's mouth, and then a few sparks fly. Suddenly there is a cough, a roar, and the whole contraption explodes, showering the beautifully rendered Ampol signs with blood and gore.

"Too much power man," says Mulletplug, "you've gotta turn down the power."

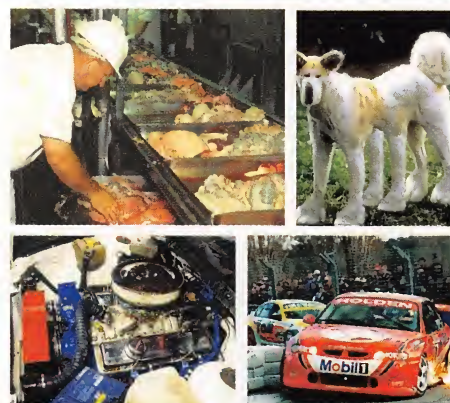
"Stop TELLING me what to do!" says Wrinklestick.

"Doof doof," says the nightclub one floor below, while the boys scuffle.

"This is the future man," insists Wrinklestick once his partner has been subdued, "the honest to God future. Players want customisation, they want whacky animals, they want V8s and they want chicks in bikinis and this game has it all. The only



Believe it or not, this is actually a real animal.



thing that would be better than this game is if this game were real, if you could really get real bits of real animals and make them into real V8 racing machines."

"And we're working on that," adds Mulletplug, as an empty can of WD40 bounces off his forehead.

With my heart warmed and my sinus buzzing with solvents, I head downstairs to the club. It's Eighties Night after all, and the boots and I are honour-bound to shake our funky thang.

Incidentally if you're ever in Bathurst, eat at the Acropole restaurant. It's totally swank.

pcpp_yellowboots@yahoo.com.au

NEXT MONTH...

• In bed with Westwood

On the eve of Command & Conquer: Renegade, we infiltrate the headquarters of the most famous RTS developer in the world. And then ask them, why make a firstperson shooter?

• Castle Wolfenstein

Reporting LIVE! from QuakeCon 2001 (well, almost live) we check out the latest from idsoftware's upcoming Nazi-Blaster.

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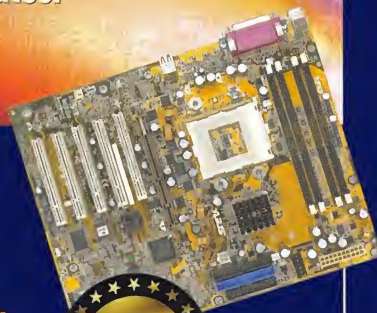
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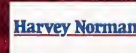


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